

sojourners

April 2013 | www.soyo.net

Faith in Action for Social Justice

A GOSPEL FOR THE COMMON GOOD

What religion forgets and politics hasn't learned.

From the new book On God's Side, by Jim Wallis

*"My concern is not whether
God is on our side; my greatest
concern is to be on God's side."*

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

PLUS:

The Letter from Birmingham Jail, 50 years later
Same-sex relationships: Reframing the conversation
Edwidge Danticat on Haiti's cathedral of dreams



EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN FAITH AND SOCIAL ACTION

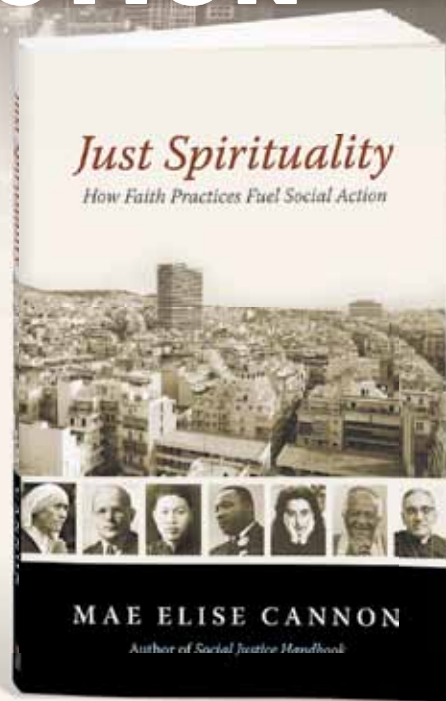
JUST SPIRITUALITY

Mae Elise Cannon opens the annals of activist history to see if there is a correlation between great acts of compassion and advocacy and great depths of prayer. Looking at the lives of Mother Teresa, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr. and others, Cannon finds a depth of spiritual practice at the root of courageous social action.

978-0-8308-3775-5, \$16.00

"Fuels . . . the kind of activism needed in our world's toughest places."

—**Rich Stearns**, president, World Vision, author, *The Hole in Our Gospel*



TOUGH QUESTIONS, STRAIGHT ANSWERS NEW IN THE SKEPTIC'S GUIDE™ SERIES



THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

With an unbiased presentation of the most controversial issues, Dale Hanson Bourke provides a framework for Americans who wish to understand Israeli-Palestinian conflict—why it began, why it continues and what remains to be done.

978-0-8308-3763-2, \$13.00

"Read [this] book and you will see this issue with new eyes."

—**Rich Stearns**, president, World Vision, author, *The Hole in Our Gospel*

Forthcoming in June 2013



RESPONDING TO HIV/AIDS

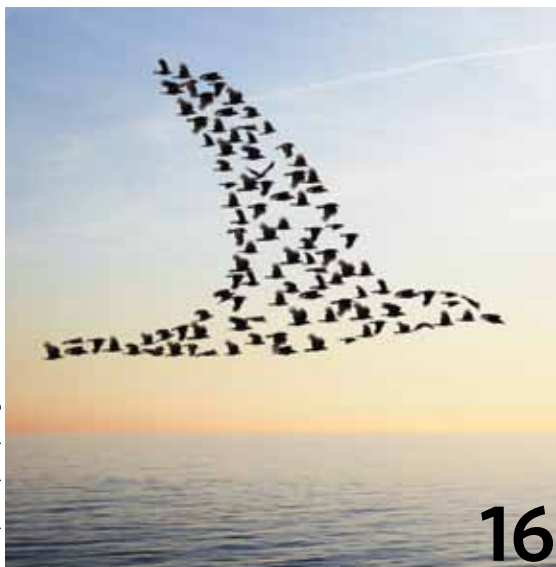
978-0-8308-3761-8,
\$15.00



IVP Books

Church. Culture. Mission.

IVPRESS.COM | 1.800.843.9487



16



20



26

sojourners contents

APRIL 2013 Vol. 42 | No. 4

COVER

16 A Gospel for the Common Good

Christianity is a call to a relationship that changes all our other relationships.

by Jim Wallis

FEATURES

20 To Redeem the Soul of a Nation

Fifty years after Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," what would he say to churches today?

by Vincent G. Harding

23 "We Dare Not Postpone Action"

Christian churches in the U.S. respond to King's letter.

26 Come With Me into the Fields

Farm labor organizing and immigration reform.

by Patrick O'Neill

30 Breaking the Impasse

Reframing the church's debate on same-sex relationships.

by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson

34 A Relentless Faith

Steven Kim's mission for the people of North Korea.

by Sylvia Yu

CULTURE WATCH

38 Edwidge Danticat on Haiti's cathedral of dreams

Reviews: *The Economy of Desire*; *Making Friends Among the Taliban*; *From Willow Creek to Sacred Heart*

40 Eyes & Ears, by Danny Duncan Collum

41 On Film, by Gareth Higgins

COMMENTARY

8 Papal transition

9 Abundance and debt

10 Sandy's impact

DEPARTMENTS

5 Letters

37 Poetry

48 Living the Word

by Martin L. Smith

COLUMNS

7 Hearts & Minds

by Jim Wallis

12 Global Engagement

by Lynne Hybels

14 Bridges

by Eboo Patel & Claire Albert

47 The Hungry Spirit

by Rose Marie Berger

50 H'rumpus

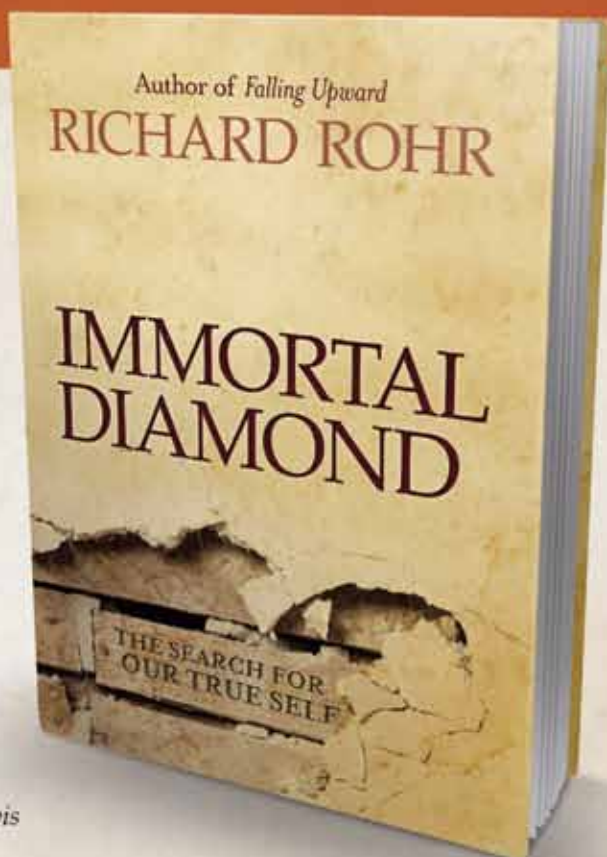
by Ed Spivey Jr.

Reveal the **Beauty** of Your True Self

In *Immortal Diamond*, **Richard Rohr** expands upon the insights of his bestselling book *Falling Upward* to offer an exploration of the deepest questions of identity, spirituality, and meaning.

With this book readers will join him in the search for True Self, an “immortal diamond” buried deep within.

ISBN 978-1-118-30359-7 | US \$19.95



“Profound, intelligent, wise, and passionate, this book continues Richard’s great work in showing us what vibrant, Jesus-centered faith looks like.”

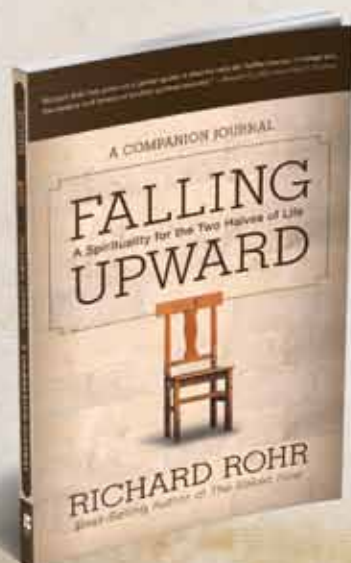
—**ROB BELL**, pastor and author of *Love Wins* and *Velvet Elvis*

“Promises and delivers a ‘staggering change of perspective’ along with a taste of intimacy of all love, both human and divine. Every word is a rare gift from a true elder and a worthy guide.”

—**PAULA D’ARCY**, author, *Gift of the Red Bird* and *Waking Up to This Day*

“The ripe fruit of a life courageously and honestly lived. Such profound wisdom conveyed with such elegant simplicity!”

—**CYNTHIA BOURGAEULT**, author, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene*, and *The Wisdom of Jesus*



Also Available!

Richard Rohr’s elegant paperback *Companion Journal* helps those who have (and those who have not) read *Falling Upward* to engage more deeply with the questions the book raises.

ISBN 978-1-118-42856-6 | US \$14.95

To learn more, visit www.wiley.com/go/Rohr

JOSSEY-BASS™
A Wiley Brand

EASTER IS A time to be inspired by Christ's example of shedding death's binding shroud—and by his followers' example of listening, as long as it takes to finally understand, to God's message that everything is different now and that we are invited to be part of the change.

Those examples have given strength to many followers of Christ, including the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as, 50 years ago this April, he penned the "Letter from Birmingham Jail." But his eloquent argument that justice delayed is justice denied has too often been given only lip service. In this issue, we excerpt a thoughtful response to King's letter by Christian Churches Together, a coalition of Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches representing more than 100 million people in the U.S. The joint

statement repents of, and calls for an active response to, key areas of racial inequity today, including starkly unequal schools, a criminal justice system that sweeps up a quarter of all African-American men, and the church's frequent choice to "avoid the fiscal, emotional, and spiritual costs of changing our beloved institutions."

What King called our "inescapable network of mutuality" is also known by another name: the Christian commitment to the common good. That millennia-old theme, relevant now more than ever, is reflected in our cover article, adapted from *Sojourners* editor-in-chief Jim Wallis' new book, *On God's Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned About Serving*



the Common Good.

The common good stretches to our neighbors far and wide—whether a businessman helping North Koreans struggling against economic and religious oppression, as Sylvia Yu describes in "A Relentless Faith," a Haitian and international team helping Port-au-Prince pursue rebuilding its earthquake-shattered cathedral, as novelist Edwidge Danticat recounts, or a growing realization, as Brooklyn native and former Sojourners summer intern Onleilove Alston writes in the wake of last year's Hurricane Sandy, that climate change is a poverty and immigration issue too. Wherever you are and wherever you serve, we wish you a lively Easter season! ■

Letters

UNWINNABLE RACE

After reading David P. Gushee's excellent article ("The U.S. Warfare State and Evangelical Peacemaking," February 2013), I am led to this observation: The United States will soon put itself—if it has not already—into the same position that Ronald Reagan put the Soviet Union into when, to keep up pace with the U.S., it was required to install a defense it could not afford, leading to its collapse.

Edgar Stoesz
Akron, Pennsylvania

OUR FIRST ALLEGIANCE

David P. Gushee asserts that "the statesperson, even the Christian statesperson, faces responsibilities involving the use of force in

was not a recruiting pitch by Paul to join the state (which was pagan at the time of his writing). On the contrary, he said: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world."

Scott Smith
Greensboro, North Carolina

TEACHING FOR PEACE

Rick Love argues in "A Heart for Peace" (February 2013) that peace must begin in the heart of individuals. After making peace with God and ourselves, we can then move out into the rest of the world. Gandhi argued that if we are to have such peace, it must begin with children.

Eighteen years ago, in a small town on the Oregon coast, Rev. Charles Busch instituted Peace Village, an interfaith weeklong summer day camp for children ages 6 to 12, to follow precisely those principles. There are now 21 villages in 10 states and Haiti. By learning about role models such as Mahatma Gandhi and St. Francis, and developing critical awareness of the media, the environment, and nutrition, children learn to build a less violent culture for their future.

Ken McCormack
Neskowin, Oregon

KEEP TALKING COMMUNITY

I just read "Why We (Still) Can't Wait" (by Rose Marie Berger) in the February issue of *Sojourners*. Thank you! It's important to keep talking about the Beloved Community; it prevents us from being divided by so many social labels.

E. Ethelbert Miller
Washington, D.C.

GUN PERSPECTIVES

"What Comes After the Grief?" (by Jim Wallis, February 2013) was a nice editorial, but not specific enough. The federal government can help—it will keep some semi-automatic and automatic weapons out of the marketplace—and the press about this will help a lot. There are so many elements of this issue—guns or no guns in our hands, mental health, democracy, and gun owners deeply concerned their rights are being taken away, etc. I think you should have recognized both sides. I am with you all the way, but it's not black and white, unfortunately.

Martha Perkins
Charlotte, Vermont

Your name here! Want to respond to an article we've printed? Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, *Sojourners*, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

"Romans 13 was not a recruiting pitch by Paul to join the state."

relation to protecting the people within his or her realm that others generally do not (cf. Romans 13:1-7)."

The state does not bind itself to the commands of Christ, but the Christian is bound by them and cannot use the excuse of government service to avoid them, thereby placing the state above Christ. Romans 13

sojourners

Chief Executive Officer/Editor-in-Chief, Jim Wallis
Chief of Staff, Joan M. Bisset
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer,
 Michael Norman
Vice President and Chief Advancement Officer,
 Robert Wilson-Black
Chief Administrative Officer, Karen L. Lattea
Senior Policy Adviser, Duane Shank

Editor, Jim Rice
Art Director, Ed Spivey Jr.
Associate Editors,
 Rose Marie Berger, Elizabeth Palmberg, Julie Polter
Assistant Editor, Elaina Ramsey

Interim Director of Marketing, Cynthia J. Martens
Marketing Manager, Joseph Orr
Director of Advertising Sales, Sandra Sims
Advertising Sales Associate, Stacey Schwenker
Design and Production Associate, Parker Haaga

Senior Director of Foundation Relations,
 Lisa Daughtry-Weiss
Director of Major Gifts, Larisa Friesen Hall
Director of Individual Giving, Leslie Nelson-Abell
Assistant Director of Major Gifts, Luke Horner
Development Associate, Erika Jackson-Stokes
Web Editor, Sandi Villarreal
Director of Web and Digital Technology, Bob Sabath
Director of Mobilizing, Lisa Sharon Harper
Director, Creation Care Campaign, Alycia Ashburn
Campaigns Manager, Beau Underwood
Immigration Campaigns Associate, Ivone Guillen
Speaking Events Manager/Director of Special Projects,
 Sondra F. Shepley
Accountant, Brion Thomas
Administrative Director, Elizabeth Denlinger Reaves
Chief Communications Officer, Tim King
Office Manager, Aimee Kang
Assistant to the CEO, James Colten

Interns: Dawn Araujo, *Editorial*; Brandon Baird,
Development; Krystal Brewer, *Resources and Circulation*;
 Kelly Dunlap, *Advertising*; Brandon Hook, *Online*; Jenny
 Smith, *Meetings and Events*; Janelle Tupper, *Campaigns*;
 Jessica Turner, *Communications*; Martin Witchger, *Mobilizing*

Contributing Editors: Diana Butler Bass, Daniel Berrigan,
 Melvin Bray, Walter Brueggemann, Majora Carter, Joan
 Chittister, Eugene Cho, Shane Claiborne, Danny Duncan
 Collum, Edwidge Danticat, Marie Dennis, John Dilulio, E.J.
 Dionne Jr., Valerie Elverton Dixon, Wes Granberg-
 Michaelson, Adam Hamilton, Vincent Harding, Obery
 Hendricks, Gareth Higgins, Joel Hunter, Lynne Hybels, Daisy
 Khan, Anne Lamott, Bill McKibben, Brian McLaren, Donald
 Miller, Ched Myers, Eboo Patel, John Perkins, Samuel
 Rodriguez, Richard Rohr, Ron Sider, Barbara Brown Taylor,
 Cornel West, Lauren Winner, Valerie Weaver-Zercher, Tyler
 Wigg Stevenson, Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Contributing Writers: Onleilove Alston, Frida Berrigan,
 Michaela Bruzzese, Kimberly Burge, Judy Coode, David
 Cortright, Aaron McCarroll Gallegos, Bob Hulteen, Celeste
 Kennel-Shank, Jesse Nathan, Brittany Shoot, Glen Stassen,
 Andrew Wilkes, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Kari Jo
 Verhulst

Sojourners magazine (ISSN 0364-2097) is published monthly,
 except September-October is combined, at 3333 14th St. NW, Suite
 200, Washington, DC 20010. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington,
 D.C., and additional mailing offices. Canadian Publications Sales
 Agreement #257494. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
 Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

Sojourners Online: www.sojournal.net • @sojourners
 Get free email updates at sojo.net/email_subscription.



*“Before I can
 tell my life
 what I want to do
 with it, I must
 listen to my life
 telling me
 who I am.”*

—Parker Palmer
*Let Your Life Speak:
 Listening for the
 Voice of Vocation*

Substance. Scripture. Service.

*With the Master of Arts in Ministry Practice
 at Austin Seminary, you will focus on effective
 communication skills, proficiency in the
 pastoral arts, and growth in spiritual maturity.*



AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
 THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

100 East 27th Street | Austin, TX 78705-5711

austinseminary.edu



NURTURING
PEACE
 IN CONTEXTS OF GLOBAL VIOLENCE

A CONFERENCE
 FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATORS
 AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

MAY 22-25
2013

New York Theological Seminary
 475 Riverside Drive • New York, NY 10115

For more information and to register:
www.cspur.nyts.edu/nurturing-peace/

BY JIM WALLIS

What Does It Mean to Be on God's Side?



I RECENTLY FINISHED a new book, which we launch on April 1, the day after Easter. The beginning of the Easter season is a liturgically appropriate moment for the introduction of a hopeful book in what many feel is a hopeless time.

I wanted to tell you, our faithful magazine readers, why I wrote this book, and why I called it *On God's Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned About Serving the Common Good*.

This is not just another book for me. I wrote it during a three-month sabbatical that started in a monastery overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Every day started before sunrise with prayers, walks, yoga, and exer-

cise, followed by writing the rest of the day. My other discipline was not to write or comment publicly on the news. I watched the nation's political discourse each night after a day of writing and found it more depressing than ever. It was an election year.

The need for the common good has never seemed so timely.

The resulting book is not about politics in the narrow sense, but about how to engage our personal and public lives with an ancient but timely idea and practice—the common good—that has long and deep historical roots across many religious faiths and secular notions of democracy. I sought to explore the biblical and theological roots of the idea, and then apply it to the most basic questions of economic trust, the role of government, civility, renewing democracy, globalization, conflict resolution in a violent world, and, of course, what our faith can contribute to the common good with the world as our parish. Most compelling, I found Jesus' call to love our neighbors to be the gospel foundation for serving the common good, and the

excerpt in this issue, "A Gospel for the Common Good" (page 16), makes the case for that.

For Christians, the book explores a fundamental question: Why did Jesus come, and what do the gospel and the mission of the church really entail? The book's message is that when people of faith actually say and do the things their faith stands for, two things happen: at first other people are surprised, and then they are attracted. It examines both inspirations and practices for how we can respond to the growing hunger for a better life together and find common ground for the common good, especially in relation to those who are the most vulnerable.

Abraham Lincoln famously said, "My concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side." That was probably the most important thing about religion ever said by an American president. Presidents and other politicians usually want to claim that God is on their side, their country's side, and even their political policy's side.

But Lincoln had it right. One of the biggest problems with religion is that people, institutions, and nations—all of our human "sides"—tend to try to claim God's favor. When people are sure they're right, they confidently say that God agrees with them. Claims of divine blessing for human behavior—often brutal behavior—have always undermined the integrity and credibility of religion. The much harder task, and the more important one, is to ask how to be on God's side. That often means changing our minds and hearts and taking on a new perspective. The Bible calls this "conversion"—and this is the most biblical and theological book I have written in some time.

Shallowness characterizes our politics, our media coverage, and our popular cultural values. If we

are truly committed to discovering what it means to be on God's side, it is time to go much deeper in seeking a redemptive path forward. It's time to move beyond our superficial, often hateful politics and media. It's time to dig deeper in the places that supply our better values and instincts and to revive the practices that renew our faith traditions and ethical priorities. And it's time to do the spiritual reflection that could provide the moral compass that our politics and economics have lost and that even our religions can forget.

I am also convinced that what happens in our households is as central to the common good as what happens outside of them. The quality of personal, everyday life in our families, neighborhoods, and local communities is vital to shaping the quality of our public life. Being a husband, father, and Little League baseball coach has convinced me that the common good is about far more than what happens in the halls of power. Restoring healthy households means making the transformation from appetites to values. Our homes must become the places where our children learn the difference between the two.

As I wrote this book, the reason for writing it became more clear: to help spark a national conversation about the meaning of the common good. Although the call to the common good goes back centuries, the need for a new dialogue about what it means and what its practice would require of us has never seemed so timely. That's why I wrote this book. I hope you find it helpful to your families, vocations, churches, and your own public witness in the world and that together we can help spark a new and needed conversation on the common good. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.



Keystone XL and Climate Change

Oklahoman Gwen Ingram stands next to a section of the Keystone XL pipeline in Stroud, Okla. Last year a campaign of direct action began in Texas against the southern leg of TransCanada's controversial 1,700-mile pipeline. Canadian tar sands carbon emissions are almost double those of traditional crude refined in the U.S., according to the EPA. The northern pipeline route, from North Dakota to Cushing, Okla., has not yet been approved by the State Department.

By Marie Dennis

Calling of the Shepherd

A prayer for the new pope to fulfill, in fresh ways, the promise of Vatican II.

WHEN POPE BENEDICT XVI unexpectedly announced his resignation in mid-February, many expressed admiration for the decision's honesty and humility, and much speculation followed about the reasons for it—and the consequences it would have.

As transition takes shape in the Vatican, Catholics around the world are commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, which took place from 1962 to 1965 and which redefined the church's relationship to the world. Vatican II's final document said: "This council can provide no more eloquent proof of its solidarity with, as well as its respect and love for the entire human family with which it is bound up, than by engaging with it in conversation about these various problems," referring in part to the "profound and rapid changes ... spreading by degrees around the whole world." Half a century ago, few could have predicted the dramatic changes that were to follow in science, technology, global integration, and social mores.

Catholics know that in the last 50 years the institutional church has been at the forefront of calls for a more just, compassionate, and sustainable world. Catholic social and ecological teaching is well developed and clearly articulated. The church has offered analysis and challenging proposals for financial reform, arms control, care for creation, and multilateral political structures of accountability in response to globalization.

We want the new pope to continue, deepen, and make much more visible—including to Catholics around the world—the church's prophetic work for social and economic justice, for environmental sustainability, and for wise, just, and inclusive peace. We want the new pope to engage the Islamic world, respectfully cooperating in response to orchestrated fear, enemy-making, and all forms of religious

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

Business and Editorial Address

Please send all business and editorial correspondence to *Sojourners*, 3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010.

Subscription and Change of Address

SUBSCRIBERS: Visit sojo.net/subscribe to manage your subscription or print change of address on a card with old address label attached; send all subscription correspondence and address changes (except countries listed below) to *Sojourners*, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856, or email us at

sojourners@cambeywest.com

(allow six weeks to process any address change).

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Sojourners*, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

Subscription Rates

U.S.: \$39.95 one year print (for first-class mail, \$50). Digital subscriptions to *Sojourners* are available for \$19.95 (free to print subscribers) at sojo.net/subscribe. **Australia:** \$78 one year (via air mail, paid in Australian currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 610, Unley 5061 SA). **New Zealand:** \$97 one year (via air mail, paid in New Zealand currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 9483, Wellington, NZ); email admin@mediacom.org.au. **UK and Ireland:** UK £30, IR £41 payable to *Sojourners* UK, and sent to *Sojourners* UK, 61 Axwell Park View, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE15 6NR; email Pam Swift at pam.swift@live.co.uk. **All other foreign surface** (six to eight weeks delivery overseas): \$49.95 one year.

All other air service overseas

(one to two weeks delivery): \$59.95 one year. Except where noted, payable in U.S. currency.

Newsstand Circulation

Newsstand circulation through Districor Magazine Distribution Services.

For more information, call (905) 619-6565, fax (905) 619-2903, or email mraucci@districor.com.

Advertising

Advertisement in *Sojourners* does not imply editorial endorsement. For information on display advertising in *Sojourners*, please write to:

Advertising, *Sojourners*, 3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010; advertising@sojo.net; or visit www.sojo.net.

Submissions

Please direct poetry to the Poetry Editor (postal mail only, address below); books, music, and reviews to the Review Editor by post or at reviews@sojo.net; and query letters (400 words or fewer) for all other suggested articles to the Manuscript Editor by post or at queries@sojo.net. No submissions will be returned. Full writer's guidelines: sojo.net/writers.

Printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper.



All content copyright ©2013 *Sojourners*
3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20010
Phone (202) 328-8842

extremism. We want him to promote cultures of peace in a world that is increasingly violent. We want him to be open to new cosmological insights that are transforming human consciousness; shifting our understanding of earth community and of our planet's place in the vast, expanding universe; and maturing our reflections on the One who is Creator, Incarnation, and Spirit of love.

At the same time, we are painfully aware that the church's witness to justice is muted and its credibility sharply undercut by scandal and exclusion. The church seems unable or reluctant to engage some exceedingly difficult questions, including how to consider freedom of conscience, pluralism, participation and democracy, and gender equality in a way that includes the diverse perspectives of women and men who have vastly different experiences of life, but an equally profound commitment to the gospel.

We are praying that the new pontiff will have deep and wide pastoral experience and will continue to live and move outside of the rarified Vatican enclave. In particular, we pray he will have:

- the capacity to engage in profound, respectful conversation with those whose life experience has thus far been largely ignored by the church, particularly women and gay or lesbian Catholics;

- the integrity to address the root causes of the horrific sexual abuse scandal that has brought shame on the Catholic Church and to ensure an absolute end to impunity for those who perpetrated or covered up the abuse; and

- the courage to commit the church to complete transparency in financial and internal management matters.

Many of us believe yet what we learned 50 years ago—that the people of God, engaged in life with all its messiness, are the church. May the new pope encounter the goodness and rich diversity of this church and allow it to guide his steps onto the global stage. ■

Marie Dennis is co-president of Pax Christi International and a Sojourners contributing editor.

By Vincent Miller

The Economics of Abundance

Austerity budgets in hard economic times are bad economics—and questionable theology.

AS THE U.S. Congress and the president repeatedly battle over the debt ceiling and contemplate cuts to Social Security and Medicare, austerity has begun to sound like common sense: “Families tighten their belts during hard times, and so must government.”

However, “common sense” in our media age is carefully manufactured, and its underlying analogy doesn’t always hold up to scrutiny. “Living within our means,” for most families, includes debt financing for housing, cars, and college. Families having a hard time paying their bills may indeed tighten their belts—but they seek more income first, and cut care for children and the sick last. In contrast, federal budget austerity arguments always focus on spending, ignoring the revenue crisis born of decades of tax cuts.

Christians have a more profound reason

to question “austerity measures”: They conflict with our faith in God’s abundance. In parable after parable—the prodigal son, the unforgiving debtor, Lazarus and the rich man—Jesus challenges us to emulate God’s generosity. It is the theme of that most eucharistic miracle, the loaves and fishes. How to live in the light of God’s abundance is never an easy question, but we must be open to its logic in every area of human existence, including our personal lives, our economy, and our government.

There is, needless to say, a deep contrast between Christian notions of abundance, rooted in God’s boundless creative gift, and the modern field of economics, which bases itself on the principle that commodities are scarce. Yet there are also resonances between abundance and modern macroeconomics (the study of whole economies)

From the Archives

April 1985

Authority Over Death

IN THE EARLY weeks of the Eastertide lectionary, there appears a series of texts from the third and fourth chapters of Acts



... Peter and John, on their way to temple prayers, heal a man begging at the beautiful gate. His joy begets a sermon from Peter on the resurrection, at the close of which the disciples are arrested and spend the night in jail. The next day in court they again testify boldly, refuse to comply with the court's order, and are released after calculated threats from the authorities. Their release prompts prayers of thanksgiving in the community.

It shouldn't be, but always is, a surprise that healing in the New Testament is cause for political trouble. It is for Jesus. His healings are carefully surveilled; they are the topic of elaborate "grand jury" investigations (John 9). More than eyebrows are raised; they conjure conflict and plottings against him. In John, it is the raising of Lazarus—the ultimate in healing miracles—that finally precipitates Jesus' arrest.

Why so? You'd almost be led to suspect that political authority rules by brokenness, infirmity, blindness, division, and by death itself. Authority over death would be an affront to any such rule.

Bill Wylie-Kellermann was a United Methodist pastor in Detroit and a Sojourners contributing editor when this article appeared.

as it developed in the New Deal period and the first three decades after World War II—especially in the great postwar era of shared prosperity, which saw an explosive expansion of the middle class.

During that period, everyone gave to the national common good, and everyone received—not just through strongly redistributive taxation, but through shared, unprecedented economic growth. And it wasn't simply the "invisible hand" of the marketplace that guided growth: The market was fostered by government's investment in infrastructure and education.

The postwar era proved that economic abundance is indeed something found in mutual sacrifice and sharing. (And when the opposite tack, austerity budgets, has been tried in recent years, it has been a dramatic economic failure in nations such as the U.K., which is facing a possible triple-dip recession.)

Of course, social democracies do fall far short of the reign of God. Justice-minded Christians can criticize nationalism's divisiveness, the exclusion of minorities from shared prosperity, the neo-colonial exploitation that supported capitalist economies, the ties between the economy and the national security state, and the unsustainable demands that models of economic growth

place upon the environment.

Although these criticisms are legitimate, we need to defend the epochal political and economic achievement of our great-grandparents. Instead of the grim options that seemed likely in the 1930s—the instabilities and injustices of communism, fascism, or laissez-faire capitalism—social democracy provided powerful structures for communal responsibility, ameliorating inequality, and caring for the vulnerable. We need not baptize the state in order to value what it can do, and to appreciate that its achievements cannot be taken for granted.

"Caritas in Veritate," Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 encyclical letter on charity and justice, taught that we are required "to be solicitous for" the institutions that structure the common good. He spoke of the "institutional" or "political path" of charity. In the midst of high-stakes budget battles, we need to speak loudly in defense of the democratic structures that have brought shared prosperity. They reflect a ray of the abundance to which God calls us all. ■

Vincent Miller teaches theology at the University of Dayton and is the author of Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture.

By Onleilove Alston

Connecting the Dots

Hurricane Sandy vividly demonstrated the relationship between climate change, poverty, and immigration.

OVER THE PAST few years, we have seen tangible proof that creation is terribly off balance. Global warming is causing droughts and heat waves around the world and is making hurricanes more powerful. In my hometown of New York City, we have experienced the effects of severe weather: Hurricane Irene in 2011 and, most recently, the devastation of Hurricane Sandy. Sandy was an eye-opening demonstration that climate change is a poverty issue, a race issue, and an immigration issue.

Though neighborhoods of all socioeconomic statuses were affected by Sandy, poorer communities are taking longer to recover. Many of them were without electricity, heat, and water longer than were more

affluent communities. For instance, residents of Red Hook's public housing projects in Brooklyn were without power and water for two weeks after the storm. My cousin Dabiah Alston, a Red Hook resident, told me that the city ignored residents' repeated requests for information about when the heat would come back on: "The bottom line is, they don't care about us. Projects are filled with poor folk, and as we all know, the poor are seldom a priority."

Hurricane Sandy shone an uncomfortable light on racial and economic disparity in New York City. As someone who was born and raised in Brooklyn, I am very familiar with Red Hook's history of poverty, and the neglect by local government. For example,

only when the community near the housing projects began to gentrify did the city start to repair the nearby subway station.

Sandy also exposed how, in the city that is home to Ellis Island, immigrants live in an environment of fear. Although families of mixed immigration status qualify for some FEMA disaster assistance, and families of any status qualify for emergency food aid, many did not apply for it because they feared deportation, as I learned at a post-Sandy meeting of the Occupy Faith group. The envi-

"As we all know, the poor are seldom a priority."

ronment of fear magnified the impact that the hurricane had already had on the poor: Many immigrants are non-salaried workers who missed a week of their already-low wages due to the hurricane.

As the waters of Hurricane Sandy washed over the East Coast and exposed great economic inequalities, they also gave us a chance to begin a process of transformation. In New York City, there are glimmers of this transformational healing in the work of countless citizens, including many people of faith, who came together to rebuild in the wake of devastation. For example, New York Theological Seminary student Valerie Close found herself thrust into the role of community organizer when she stepped up to coordinate the recovery efforts in her Far Rockaway neighborhood in Queens. "This situation has been very difficult for my community," Close said. "I lost a lot, like many of my neighbors. It is times like these when we are called to step forward and put our faith into action."

Sandy's waters, as did those of Katrina seven years earlier, have started to wash away our nation's illusions concerning climate change and its effects. Hurricane Sandy and its aftermath demand that as people of faith we advocate for holistic justice—and see the interconnectedness between the way we treat creation and the way we treat people. ■

***Onleilove Alston**, a Sojourners contributing writer, is a community organizer living in Harlem. Her writing has appeared in *Your Black World* and the *Huffington Post*. She is a member of Sojourners' Emerging Voices Project and blogs at *Wholeness4Love*.*

We won't separate mission and compassion, because Jesus doesn't. With Jesus and with each other we change the future.

Plain and simple—this is what we do.

JOIN WITH US.

INTEGRATED COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

WWW ITEAMS.US/2020

2020 VISION

50 communities where no one is invisible and everyone has access to food, freedom, and forgiveness

PHOTO ANDREW NICODEM / ITEAMS / KENYA

International Teams

LUKE 4:18-19

The Cost of 'Perverted' Preaching

THE DEATH OF a college student who had been gang-raped in Delhi provoked outrage and anger. More than 2 million Indian students joined a movement to protest the rising violence against women in India. According to official data, reported cases of rape have more than doubled in the past 20 years, and women are the victims of a high proportion of other violent crimes.

But there's another side to this story. "Almost as shocking as the Delhi gang rape has been the range of voices that have sounded after it," wrote Sagarika Ghose, a TV journalist and commentator. "Patriarchy is chillingly omnipresent." Rather than blaming those who attack women, leaders in some Indian villages blame

raped thousands of women. They know that if they rape enough women and girls, they can destroy the social fabric of an entire community.

But in the DRC I discovered something worse than rape as a weapon of war. I discovered an underlying culture of rape in which violating women sexually has become normalized, accepted. In this extremely patriarchal society, boys are taught that being a man means dominating women. Rapists are congratulated on being "man enough" to "take a woman."

Congolese surgeon Monique Kapamba Yangoy explained that the DRC has laws prohibiting men from having sex with girls under 18, but they're not enforced. It is not uncommon for girls as young as fifth grade to ensure "success" in school by having sex with their teachers. University students who demand that their professors wear condoms when they have sex with them tend to get lower grades than girls who don't demand condoms. Women are often asked to have sex with potential employers before they can get a job.

Perhaps the deepest problem, suggests Dr. Yangoy, is that women in such cultures are conditioned to believe they truly are of little value. So they lose the will to fight back, to stand up for themselves, to expect just and loving treatment.

In the DRC, as in many countries, churches have often reinforced this perspective by preaching a perverted message of female submission. Women are to submit, period. No one mentions that



Congolese surgeon and activist Monique Kapamba Yangoy

Christine Anderson

men are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church—even to the point of giving his life for his beloved. No one mentions the concept of mutual submission.

But in the DRC that is beginning to change. One reason I work with World Relief Congo is that it actively works toward the slow but sustainable transformation of cultural attitudes toward gender and sex. I sat with Congolese church leaders as Dr. Yangoy challenged them as a woman, a doctor, and a Christian to use their positions of power to protect and empower women and girls.

Recently, at a gathering of women leaders from around the world, I joined women from many faiths in denouncing the actions of those who wrongly use our sacred texts and belief systems to degrade women. Together we agreed to give our voices, our money, and our time to the people, organizations, and cultural movements that honor rather than degrade women. Please join me—for the sake of every woman in India, in the DRC, and in your community and mine. ■

Lynne Hybels, co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, is author of *Nice Girls Don't Change the World*.



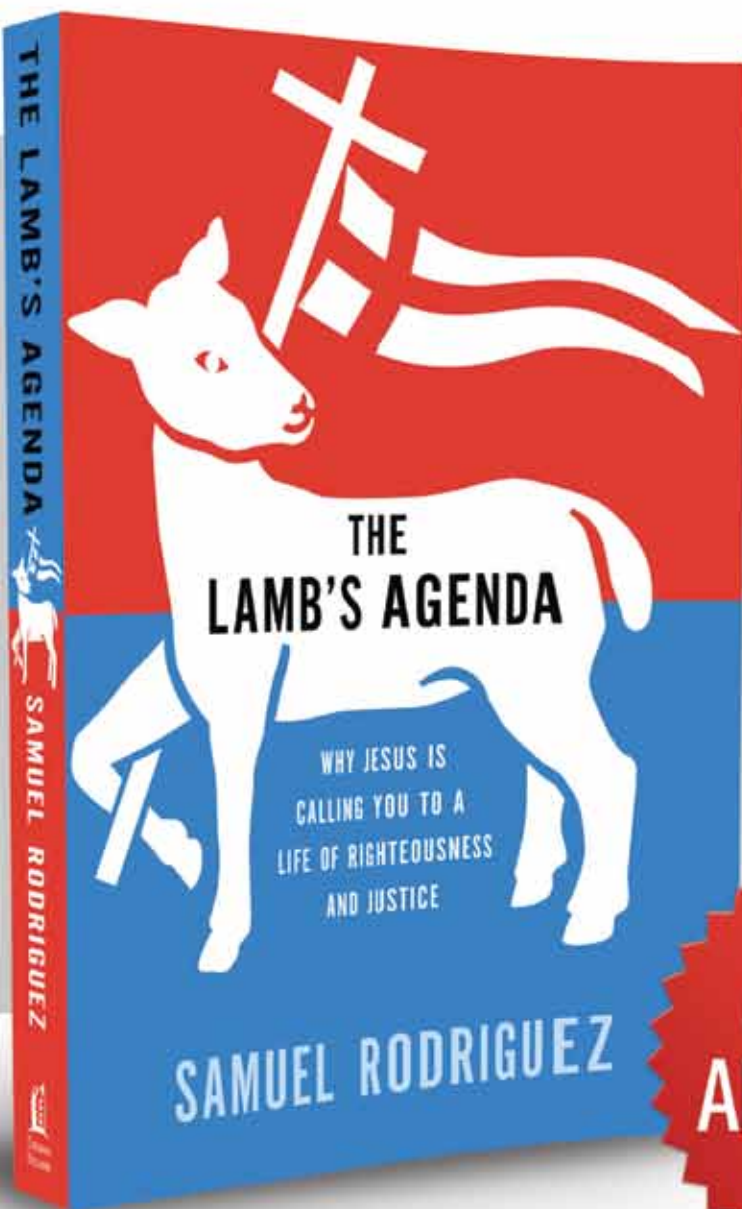
We're seeing a slow but sustainable transformation of cultural attitudes toward gender and sex.

Westernization, liberal consumerism, growing individualism, or even the women themselves—because they wear "skimpy clothes," talk on mobile phones, and work outside the home, according to South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* newspaper.

For 19-year-old Kanika Sharma, these leaders miss the point. "It is all about the mentality of the boys," Sharma told the *Mail & Guardian*. "They think because they are men, they can do anything. But girls should get equal rights and opportunities."

Sharma speaks while standing under a sign that says: *Being a woman should not make you feel vulnerable*. But sadly, throughout the world women do feel vulnerable.

Before I traveled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)—described as the "rape capital" of the world—I studied reports on rape as a weapon of war. In the DRC rebel soldiers have brutally



*Rev. Samuel Rodriguez
explores the question:*

IS THERE A DIVINE CURE FOR OUR AILING NATION?

AVAILABLE
APRIL 2013

“

Reverend Rodriguez reveals that we are dealing with the clashing of human-interest agendas not far from those my father faced in April 1963. He also proposes the need to go back to the basic founding principles of our nation, which were biblical. ”

—Bernice A. King,
founder and president, Be A King Enterprises, LLC
(from the Foreword)



Download the first chapter free!
nelsonfree.com/lambsagenda

lambsagenda.com



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

The Inaugural Prayer We Didn't Hear

WHO SHOULD BE able to pray at a presidential inauguration and what should that prayer be?

On Jan. 20, 1937, Monsignor John A. Ryan delivered the first inaugural benediction at the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt with these words: "Almighty God, ruler of nations, we beseech thee to bless the people of the United States. Keep them at peace among themselves and in concord with all other peoples. Cause justice and charity to flourish among them, that they may all be enabled to live as persons created in thine own image and likeness."

Since this first benediction, ministers, priests, bishops, cardinals, and rabbis have offered prayers at the past 18 presidential inaugurations. Almost 76 years to the day since Father Ryan's benediction, Myrlie



Church near the White House and is known for welcoming openly gay Christians, replaced the administration's first choice, Rev. Louie Giglio. Giglio withdrew from the ceremony after the surfacing of his controversial sermon from 20 years ago condemning gay relationships. Giglio's stance on the issue of gay marriage is in sharp contrast to the beliefs of Rev. León, whose parish will begin to bless same-sex partnerships and ordain transgender priests this summer.

Inaugural prayers have been given by Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious leaders, but never by a Muslim clergyperson. So we offer a sample inaugural prayer from Islam:

Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim. In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings upon him, said that God's angels flock to places where God is remembered and praised. The angels encircle the community until they've stretched up to heaven and speak of the gathering with God. In turn He extends His mercy and forgiveness upon all those present, worshippers and not.

Thank You, O God, for bestowing this great responsibility of American pluralism upon us, and for creating us

into diverse nations and tribes so that we may know one another, and act righteously with each other. Forgive us for all of those times when we don't.

O God, we ask that you help our nation be worthy of your angels and become a nation where everyone—regardless of where we come from, how much money we have, what name we call God, or whom we love—is safe and celebrated; a nation that inspires greatness in citizens of all nations. We invite you to imagine the multitudes of angels above us.

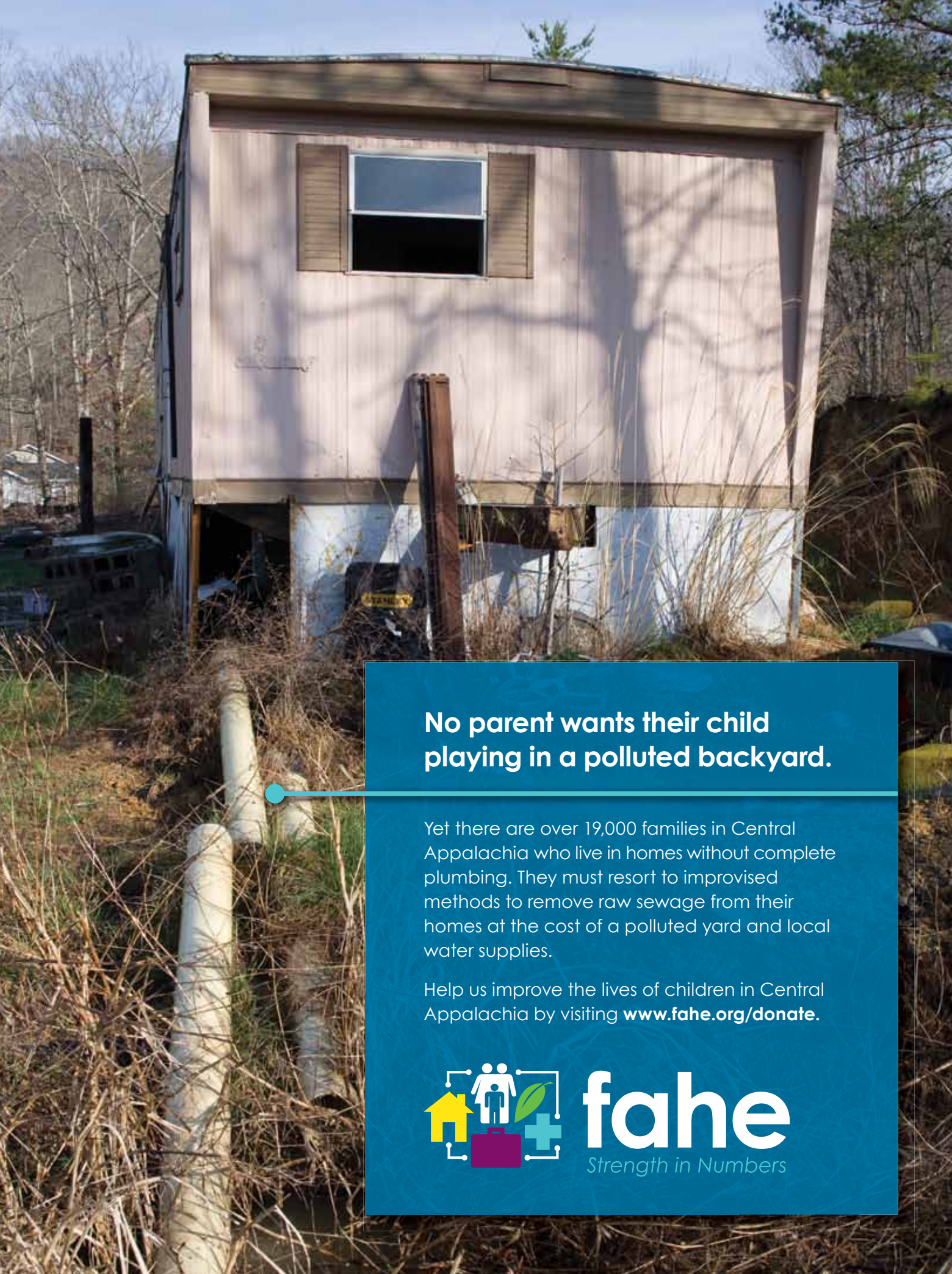
An inaugural prayer should connect the particularities of one's own faith tradition—the scripture, stories, heroes, etc.—with the pluralism of the nation. The theme should be inclusivity, hope, and tolerance, and the language should be the distinctiveness of the tradition the clergyperson claims as home. Living in spite of our different faiths is not what makes America great; instead what makes our nation flourish are the countless contributions we all offer because of our unique religious (and other) traditions. ■

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American of Indian heritage. Claire Albert is IFYC's executive office manager.

An inaugural prayer should connect the particularities of one's own faith tradition with the pluralism of the nation.

Evers-Williams became the first layperson to deliver the inaugural invocation, and Rev. Luis León, an Episcopal priest, offered his prayer for President Obama and our nation: "... with the blessing of your blessing, we will see that we are created in your image, whether brown, black, or white, male or female, first-generation immigrant American or daughter of the American Revolution, gay or straight, rich or poor ... with your blessing we will recognize the abundance of the gifts of this good land with which you have endowed this nation."

You may remember that the selection of Rev. León, like most decisions made in Washington today, did not come without controversy and an onslaught of protests. León, who ministers at St. John's



No parent wants their child playing in a polluted backyard.

Yet there are over 19,000 families in Central Appalachia who live in homes without complete plumbing. They must resort to improvised methods to remove raw sewage from their homes at the cost of a polluted yard and local water supplies.

Help us improve the lives of children in Central Appalachia by visiting www.fahe.org/donate.



fahe
Strength in Numbers

A GOSPEL FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Christianity is a call to a relationship that changes all our other relationships.

by **JIM WALLIS**

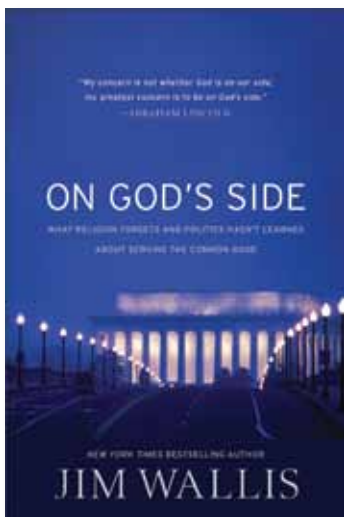
OUR LIFE TOGETHER can be better. Ours is a shallow and selfish age, and we are in need of conversion—from looking out just for ourselves to also looking out for one another. It's time to hear and heed a call to a different way of life, to reclaim a very old idea called the common good. Jesus issued that call and announced the kingdom of God—a new order of living in sharp contrast to all the political and religious kingdoms of the world. That better way of life was meant to benefit not only his followers but everybody else too. And that is the point of it.

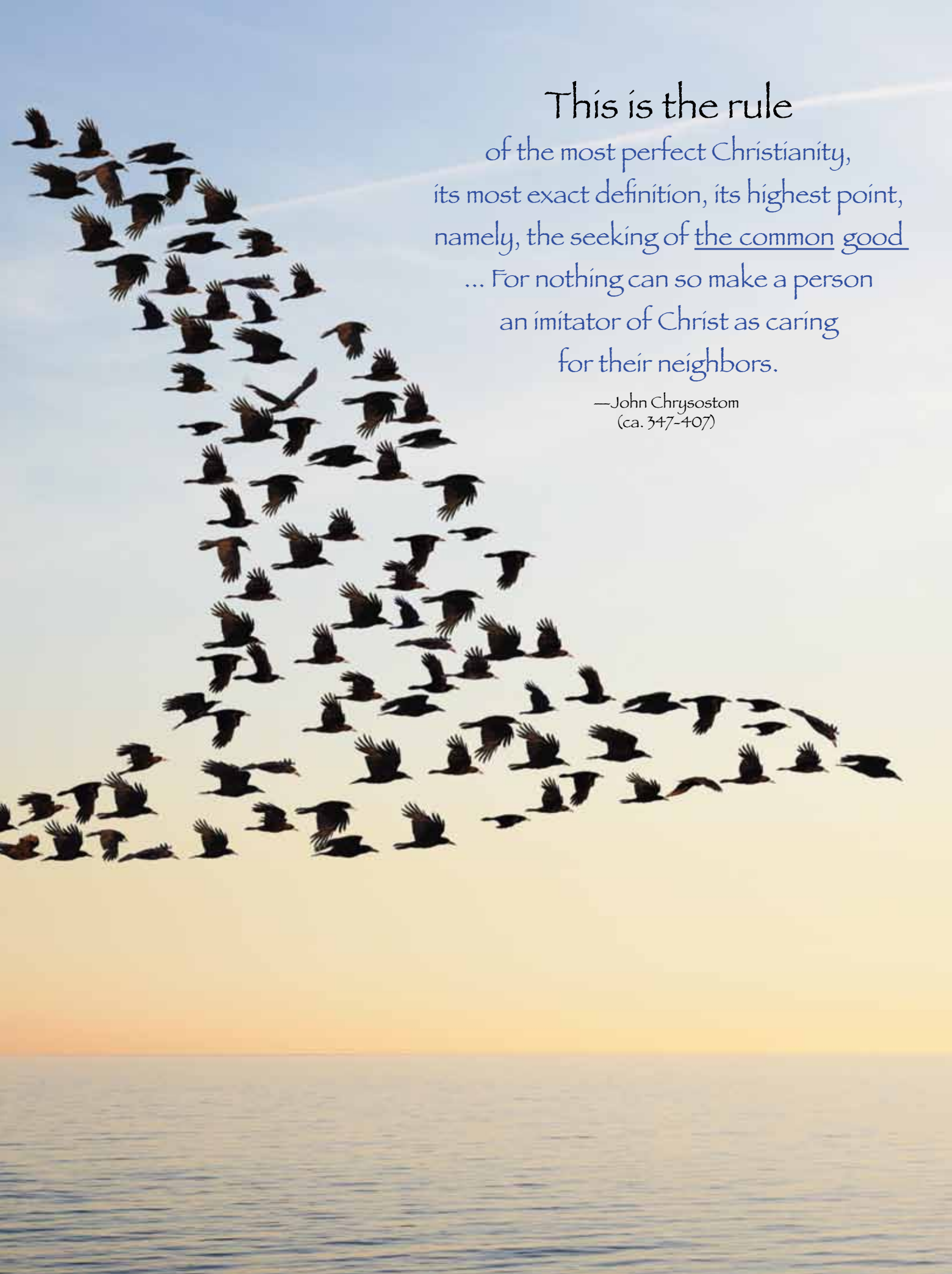
Christianity is not a religion that gives some people a ticket to heaven and makes them judgmental of all others. Rather, it's a call to a relationship that changes all our other relationships. Jesus told us a new relationship with God also brings us into a new relationship with our neighbor, especially with the most vulnerable of this world, and even with our ene-

mies. But we don't always hear that from the churches. This call to love our neighbor is the foundation for reestablishing and reclaiming the common good, which has fallen into cultural and political—and even religious—neglect.

Judaism, of course, agrees that our relationship with God is supposed to change all our other relationships, and Jesus' recitation of the law's great commandments to love God and your neighbor flows

Jim Robbins / Getty Images



A large flock of birds, likely geese, is captured in flight against a soft, hazy sky at sunset or sunrise. The birds are arranged in a loose V-shape, with many others scattered around, creating a sense of movement and unity. The background shows a calm body of water reflecting the warm, golden light of the low sun.

This is the rule
of the most perfect Christianity,
its most exact definition, its highest point,
namely, the seeking of the common good
... For nothing can so make a person
an imitator of Christ as caring
for their neighbors.

—John Chrysostom
(ca. 347–407)



How might our public life be improved if our religious traditions practiced what they preached?

right out of the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus (see Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). Islam also connects the love of Allah with love and responsibility to our neighbors. In fact, virtually all the world's major religions say that you cannot separate your love for God from your love for your neighbor, your brothers and sisters. Even the nonreligious will affirm the idea of "the Golden Rule": "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31).

That transformation of all our relationships, especially the clear connection between loving God and loving your neighbor, has always—when lived out—been the best catalyst for movements aimed at improving the human community. But the common good is quite uncommon today. We seem to have lost this unifying vision in our community and public life, and especially in our politics—on both sides of the aisle. In the intensely ideological and increasingly vitriolic political battles of Washington, D.C., the common good is virtually ignored.

So it's time to listen again to an old but always new vision that could, and is supposed to, change our selfish behavior—and make us happier too. Jesus said those who live by the beatitudes of his kingdom are "blessed" or "happy" (Matthew 5:3-12). But it's a happiness different from and deeper than what we are offered by a selfish society, which actually makes us feel quite fearful and unhappy.

I am a Christian. For me, these three things are clear:

- Christian conversion involves more than just the destiny of the soul; it involves the way we live in the world.
- Faith transcends politics, and Christianity doesn't translate only into right-wing voting issues, despite what both the conservative and liberal media love to keep saying. But neither can it be repositioned into left-wing politics. We don't simply need a Religious Left to counter the Religious Right.
- Faith should be lived out in our public life for the common good. As people of faith, our challenge is to rise above political ideology and lead on moral grounds.

The common good is about so much more than partisan politics. It grows out of our personal and family lives, our vocational

callings, the mission and witness of our congregations, the moral power of social movements, and the independent integrity of prophetic religious leadership in our public life as we fight not just for "our" rights but for the rights of all people.

It is time to reclaim the neglected common good and to learn how faith might help, instead of hurt, in that important task. Our public life could be made better, even transformed or healed, if our religious traditions practiced what they preached in our personal lives; in our families' decisions; in our work and vocations; in the ministry of our churches, synagogues, and mosques; and in our collective witness. In all these ways we can put the faith community's influence at the service of this radical neighbor-love ethic that is faithful both to God and to the common good.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments."

—Matthew 22:36-40

The summation of ethics and the religious laws, said Jesus, was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Loving God comes first, and then is immediately connected to our neighbor, whom we are to love as ourselves. There has likely never been a more radical statement—that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. There is no unhealthy or ascetic self-denial here. We are to care for ourselves and our families and our children, but we are asked to also care for our neighbors as ourselves, and our neighbor's children as our children. This is an ethic that would transform the world. It was supposed to, and it has.

This most fundamental teaching of faith flies right in the face of all the selfish personal and political ethics that put myself always before all others: my concerns first, my rights first, my freedoms first, my interests first, my tribe first, and even my country first—ahead of everybody else. Self-concern is the personal and political ethic that dominates

our world today, but the kingdom of God says that our neighbor's concerns, rights, interests, freedoms, and well-being are as important as our own.

This ethic is not only radical and transformational; it is absolutely essential if we are to create a public life that is not completely dominated by political conflict, and if we are to articulate what might be in the interest of the common good. Perhaps, if we follow this teaching, we will even find some common ground between us.

Living out the neighbor ethic is essential to religion attaining any credibility again. Otherwise, the next generation is just going to move on from religion. Ask this question: Is love of neighbor the primary thing that people think about when they watch the behavior of our faith communities and institutions? Or are they more likely to see self-interest and judgment of others?

Religion makes a big mistake when its primary public posture is to protect itself and its own interests. It's even worse when religion tries to use politics to enforce its own codes and beliefs or to use the force of law to control the behavior of others. Religion does much better when it leads—when it actually cares about the needs of everybody, not just its own community, and when it makes the best inspirational and common-sense case, in a pluralistic democracy, for public policies that express the core values of faith in regard to how we should all treat our neighbors.

There is a deep hunger, especially among a new generation of young people, for a new ethic of loving our neighbors, in our neighborhoods and around the world. But who will offer leadership toward a new (and old) neighbor ethic for the common good? If the faith community does that, people will actually be drawn back to faith; but if we don't, our losses will continue until the majority of people will answer religious surveys with "none of the above," currently the fastest-growing affiliation.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The prerequisite for solving the deepest problems this country and the world now face is a commitment to this very ancient idea whose time has urgently come: the common good. How do we work together, even with people with whom we don't agree? How do we treat each other, especially the poorest

and most vulnerable? How do we take care of not just ourselves but also one another? Only by inspiring a spiritual *and* practical commitment to the common good can we help make our personal and public lives better.

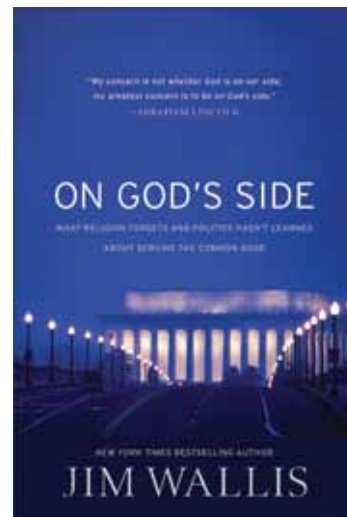
But the public discussion we must now have about the common good concerns not just politics but all the decisions we make, from our personal to our public lives. It is those individual and communal choices that will ultimately create the cultural shifts and social movements that really do change politics in the long run.

For Christians, the idea of the common good derives from Jesus' commandment to love our neighbor—including "the least of these"—which is still the most transformational social ethic the world has ever seen. But all our faith traditions agree that loving our neighbor is required if we say we love God. Making our treatment of the most vulnerable the moral test of any society's "righteousness" or integrity is ultimately the best way to make absolutely sure that we are protecting the human life and dignity of all God's children. A commitment to the *common good* is also the best way to find *common ground* with other people—even with those who don't agree with us or share our faith commitments. The common good welcomes all the "tribes" into God's beloved community, and our social behavior and public policies must show that.

Many people in America feel politically homeless in the raging battles between ideological extremes. But they could find their home in a new call for the common good—a vision drawn from the heart of our religious traditions that allows us to make our faith public but not narrowly partisan.

To be on God's side and not merely claim that God is on ours means to live out the prayer Jesus taught us to pray: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven." I hope you will join the common-good conversation, which I believe could be transformative for us all. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine. This article is adapted from his forthcoming book On God's Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned About Serving the Common Good (©2013) with permission from Brazos Press. The book is available at store.sojournal.net starting March 31.



Religion makes a big mistake when its primary public posture is to protect itself and its own interests.



7089

13

TO REDEEM THE SOUL OF AMERICA

King's "living letter" from Birmingham jail still speaks to us all • by VINCENT G. HARDING

AT TIMES IT SEEMS VERY HARD to realize that half a century has passed since my late wife, Rosemarie, and I were in Birmingham, Ala., living out a part of our years of service as representatives of the Mennonite churches of America to the Southern freedom movement—that historic black-led struggle for the expansion of democracy in America (inadequately labeled “the civil rights movement”).

It was in the midst of those powerful days, in the late winter and early springtime of 1963, when our extraordinary people's movement was spread-

What would King be saying to his beloved churches today?

ing to dozens of communities across the South, with some important reverberations in the North, and across the world as well. Usually initiated by courageous home-grown black leaders such as Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham and Victoria Gray of Palmers Crossing, Miss.,

the determined local groups often called upon national or South-wide organizations to help them in their campaigns.

Late in 1961, Shuttlesworth, who was part of the King-led Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), asked Martin Luther King Jr. and SCLC to come help the Birmingham movement. It faced a level of continuing white terrorism that led the black community to call their city “Bombingham,” referring, of course, to the deadly violence they encountered whenever they attempted to challenge the white segregationist powers who were determined to keep black people in a submissive, separate, and dominated role.

When King and SCLC decided to respond to Shuttlesworth and move onto the Birmingham scene, Rosemarie and I were already friends and co-workers with Martin and Coretta, and King asked us to come participate in the struggle for the transformation of Birmingham. So we were present and in the line of marchers when King, his co-worker Ralph Abernathy, and others were arrested in early April 1963.

When the extraordinary and prophetic handwritten “Letter from Birmingham Jail” began to emerge surreptitiously in the hands of King’s lawyers, we were able to share some of the excitement that surrounded its appearance, page by page, first around the edges of *The Birmingham News*, then on sheet after sheet from smuggled pads of paper.

At left, Martin Luther King Jr. sits for his mug shot in the Birmingham jail in 1963.



Inside the Birmingham city jail, Dr. King wrote his original notes on the margins of a newspaper. He continued the letter, which appears in the background, on pads of paper smuggled into his cell.

Photos from Martin Luther King Jr. archives

7089



The extraordinary and prophetic handwritten "Letter from Birmingham Jail" began to emerge surreptitiously in the hands of King's lawyers.

Now in the spring of 2013—exactly 50 years after the letter was written—it is hard to resist the temptation to respond when my friends and co-workers of a younger generation ask about the meaning of the message for 1963, as well as its possible continuing message for this time and place.

From the moment we began to read the original document, Rosemarie and I knew that one of Martin's clearest intentions was to provide an unequivocal response to the white ministers whose recent public letter had questioned the decision that he and SCLC had made to come to Birmingham. These "moderate" white religious leaders had essentially called King and his organization "outside agitators" whose presence in Birmingham was "unwise and untimely."

It is likely that these pastors did not know or remember that SCLC had declared in its founding mission statement that "We have come to redeem the soul of America." King certainly knew this and would never forget it. So he took the opportunity to state very clearly in his letter, "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here."

Pressing even further, he boldly announced, "I am cognizant of the inter-relatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham."

Then, speaking as the pastor, prophet, and philosophical theologian that he was, King reminded his fellow ministers that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." That was the context in which King expressed his "deep disappointment" with the Christian churches that should have been standing at the side of the oppressed if they were serious about following Jesus.

AND WHAT WOULD King be saying to his beloved churches today?

His deeply loving critique certainly would not be confined to the white churches. His insistence on speaking for the oppressed, neglected, and beaten up members of our society would surely lead him to ask, for

instance, this important question: How can we religious people of every color hide out in our suburbs and newly gentrified, safe urban spaces when our children throughout the cities of America are reacting to our neglect and inattention by destroying themselves in all the ways our society makes available to its lost children?

And, of course, King would remind us that "injustice anywhere" now surely includes all the places where our deadly drones are creating havoc with the innocent lives of other human beings of all ages, where torture is again an American export and our rates of deportation are as high as they've ever been—all this threatening the best teachings of our own democracy.

Today, with only slight changes, the "Letter from Birmingham Jail" would surely be addressed to the White House—and King's loving disappointment would certainly be even deeper.

Of course, if it is carefully examined, the 2013 version of the letter may well be addressed to all of us—"We, the people." Could it be that after half a century, we—especially we the rising new majority—must claim every letter from jail as addressed to us? And then, like King and his jailed companions, we must come out and go to work to redeem the soul of America. Are we ready?

To add the words of our late sister June Jordan to the words of King, it may well be that "we are the ones we have been waiting for"—that Fannie Lou Hamer and Fred Shuttlesworth and Rosa Parks and Viola Liuzzo and Amzie Moore and Mickey Schwerner have been working for—along with all our children and all our ancestors, including Ancestor Jesus.

Isn't that what King was saying during his last months when he kept repeating, "America, you must be born again"? ■

Vincent G. Harding, author of Hope and History and There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America, is a Sojourners contributing editor.

'WE DARE NOT POSTPONE ACTION'

Church leaders respond, 50 years later, to King's
"Letter from Birmingham Jail."

In January 2011, members of Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. met in Birmingham, Ala., to examine issues of domestic poverty and racism through the lens of the civil rights movement and by reading together Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." As they gathered in the 16th Street Baptist Church under the beautiful Wales Window portraying the black Christ, which replaced the window blown out when the church was bombed in 1963, these contemporary church leaders, representing the broadest Christian fellowship in the country—36 national communions and seven national organizations, including Sojourners—realized that apparently no clergy had ever issued a response to King's famous letter, even though it was specifically addressed to "fellow clergymen [sic]." In 2013, to mark the 50th anniversary of King's letter, Christian Churches Together released its thoughtful response, which we excerpt below. —The Editors

WE CONFESS. As leaders of churches claimed by more than 100 million Americans; as Catholics, evangelicals, Pentecostals, Orthodox, Historic Protestants, and members of Historic Black denominations; as people of many races and cultures: We call ourselves, our institutions, and our members to repentance. We make this confession before God and offer it to all who have endured racism and injustice both within the church and in society.

As church leaders, we confess we have tended to emphasize our responsibility to obey the law while neglecting our equal moral obligation to change laws that are unjust in their substance or application. All too often, the political involvement of Christians has been guided by the pursuit of personal or group advantage rather than a biblically grounded moral compass. We confess it is too easy for those of us who are privileged to counsel others simply to "wait"—or to pass judgment that they deserve no better than what they already have.

We confess that we are slow to listen and give legitimacy to those whose experience of race relations and social privilege in America is different than our own. We keep the "other" at arm's length to avoid hearing the call to sacrifice on their behalf. Our reluctance to embrace our "inescapable network of mutuality" underscores Dr. King's observation that privileged groups seldom give up their advantages voluntarily.

For example, it is difficult to persuade most suburban Christians to demand that they strive for the same quality of education in our cities that they take for granted in their own schools. To the extent that we do not listen in love, our influence in society is limited to "a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound."

We confess that we often prefer stability to upheaval, even when upheaval is the necessary

While our context today is different, the call is the same as in 1963.

precondition for the establishment of justice. We confess that we often avoid the fiscal, emotional, and spiritual costs of changing our beloved institutions—even when called to do so by our Lord and Savior. Our churches and denominational structures thus fail in critical ways to model the "creative psalm of brotherhood" invoked by Dr. King. Recent efforts in the Christian community toward "racial reconciliation," though laudable in intent, tend to stop short of Dr. King's vision of true justice and fellowship. Sunday morning remains the most segregated time in our nation.

WE RESOLVE. We proclaim that, while our context today is different, the call is the same as in



In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were

1963—for followers of Christ to stand together, to work together, and to struggle together for justice. Inspired by Dr. King, we resolve courageously to face the injustice that is within ourselves, our institutions, and our nation. The church must lead rather than follow in the march toward justice. We also claim the strong biblical tradition that rejects selfish individualism. Biblical faith teaches that we are made for community; that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers; that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Biblical faith demands that Christians place the common good above individual privilege. As Dr. King insisted, this biblical summons to justice for all is also rooted deeply in the best of our American ideals, however imperfectly our nation has lived them.

In response to this high calling on the church to join God's work of redemption and reconciliation, we resolve to work together to expose, confront, and transform the devastating legacy of systemic racism as it manifests itself in education, criminal justice, employment, housing, child welfare, and other practical arenas.

- This includes reform of an educational system that perpetuates the injustice of abysmally inadequate urban, largely minority schools alongside excellent majority-white suburban schools.

- This includes reform of a judicial system that intersects with one-quarter of all African-American men, with a devastating impact on families and communities.

We will risk being called extremists to refuse to postpone for another generation or three the just reality of quality education for all our children. We will risk creative tension to show our people that biblical justice demands prompt, vigorous change. We dare not postpone action to a more convenient time when government budgets are flush and all complexities are resolved. We call on our members, as well as our government, to demand justice in our courts and schools in this generation and end the scandal of ongoing racial discrimination. We resolve to "not merely be a thermometer that record[s] the ideas and principles of popular opinion," as King put it, but "a thermostat that transform[s] the mores of society."

Looking inward, we also resolve to work diligently toward the goal of becoming a church that is anti-racist.

- This requires self-examination. We resolve that our member churches will seek to discover and intentionally reflect upon their own histories of implicit and complicit participation in racial and ethnic injustice.

- This requires communicating. We resolve that our member churches and organizations will participate in intentional dialogue about the sin of racism and the pervasive effects of systemic racism within the church and the larger society.

- This requires action. We resolve that all member churches be encouraged to adopt anti-racism mandates, including policies that include anti-racism education and programs for local church members, staff, and volunteers.

- This requires equipping. We resolve to educate church leaders and local church members on ways to speak truth to power, organize their communities for nonviolent resistance, and participate effectively in legislative advocacy against manifestations of systemic racism.

- This requires collaboration. We resolve to connect diverse denominations in working together to dismantle racism in church and in society, partnering and sharing resources and costs associated with doing anti-racism work.

- This requires relationship. We resolve to cultivate opportunities to develop authentic relationships with people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. By humble listening and honest sharing, we will develop the empathy that gives energy to action.

- All of this requires God working among us. We resolve that, in our worship, we will celebrate our unity in Christ. We will confess, both corporately and individually, the race-based exclusion, oppression, and sin we have perpetuated. We resolve to allow worship to form us in such a way that we might bear the fruits of deep repentance—for some, recognizing our participation in racism; for others, speaking truthfully and forgiving boldly; and for all, seeking justice and right relationships with our brothers and sisters.

Inspired and ennobled by Dr. King's vision, may the fruit of our Christian unity be justice. And may the fruit of justice be to draw all people to know and glorify the God of justice. ■



Biblical justice demands prompt, vigorous change.

Engaging faith to engage the world

Bridging difference
Listening generously
Telling Good News

Louisville
Seminary

800.264.1839 | www.lpts.edu



Lorie Jacobs
Master of Divinity Student
Louisville, KY

Explore these degrees | Master of Divinity, MA Marriage & Family Therapy, MA (Religion), Doctor of Ministry



The True Cost of Low Prices

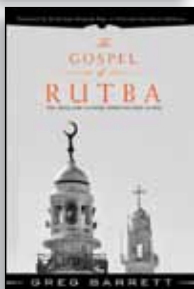
The Violence of Globalization

Second Edition

JEFFREY ODELL KORGAN and
VINCENT A. GALLAGHER

A thoroughly updated edition of the popular work on what globalization does to the earth's most vulnerable people—and what we can do about it.

978-1-62698-002-0 224 pp pbk \$22



The Gospel of Rutba

War, Peace, and the Good Samaritan Story in Iraq

GREG BARRETT

Afterword by Shane Claiborne

"Readers of these pages [become] witnesses to amazing grace."

—BRIAN McLAREN

978-1-62698-003-7 240 pp pbk \$22



Monseñor Romero

Memories in Mosaic

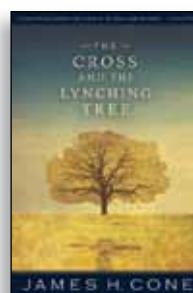
MARÍA LÓPEZ VIGIL

A portrait of El Salvador's beloved Archbishop through the eyes of his people. "A symphony of testimony to the life of one who struggled [toward] heaven and a new earth."

—CAROLYN FORCHÉ,

poet/author, *The Country Between Us*

978-1-62698-010-5 320 pp Paperback \$30



Now in paperback!

The Cross and the Lynching Tree

JAMES H. CONE

A landmark in the conversation about race and religion in America. "Once again James Cone demonstrates why he is indispensable as an interpreter of faith, race, and the American experience."

—BILL MOYERS

978-1-62698-005-1 220 pp pbk \$24



Ignacio Ellacuría

Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation

MICHAEL E. LEE

These seminal essays by the Salvadoran Jesuit and scholar, murdered in 1989, challenge us to rethink God-talk and how the gospel should be lived.

MAY 978-1-62698-022-8 288 pp pbk \$40

From your bookseller or direct

Follow us

www.maryknollmall.org



ORBIS BOOKS

Maryknoll, NY 10545

1-800-258-5838

COME WITH ME INTO THE FIELDS

In today's environment, there's little difference between farm labor organizing and immigration reform.

BREAKTHROUGHS ON immigration reform will make life easier for some Latino immigrants, but in the sweltering, often-toxic fields where farm workers toil each summer from Maine to California, conditions can still be dehumanizing and dangerous. There is a silver lining, however. With the burgeoning growth of the nation's Latino population, there are more advocates than ever working to improve the plight of the men, women, and often children who do hard labor on our nation's farms.

With a mostly young, deeply committed staff, the Florida-based Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is doing solid grassroots work to make life better for workers in the state's tomato industry. With cooperation from 11 food retail and food service corporations, CIW has implemented the Campaign for Fair Food, which has brought modest wage increases, worker protections, and grievance procedures to farms that produce 90 percent of the state's tomato crop.

Using a worker-led administrative structure and significant public pressure, CIW has brought companies such as McDonald's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, and KFC into its program that asks corporate partners to kick in an extra penny per pound for the tomatoes they buy. That premium is passed on to growers to increase worker pay.

Elbin Perez, 23, a farm worker from Guatemala, has been working in the U.S. for six years, sending part of his wages back home to his parents and five siblings. As a CIW member, Perez leads "worker-to-worker education programs." Those trainings educate workers about CIW's code of conduct, which growers have agreed to uphold. Reforms

include use of time clocks, guaranteed minimum wage, and water and shade breaks.

Perez said prior to the implementation of CIW's reforms, he witnessed many hardships in the fields, including wage theft, unsafe conditions, and sexual harassment of women workers. Perez told *Sojourners* it has "made an enormous difference to be part of the coalition."

When he visits CIW-partnered farms, Perez convenes meetings with workers and crew leaders during business hours on company property about the Fair Food program "point-by-point, right-by-right, explaining each one in detail," he said.

THE DOWNSIDE OF the Fair Food initiative is that it only includes tomatoes, and because it requires cooperation up and down the supply chain, many corporate giants, such as Publix and Wendy's, have not signed on with CIW, whose campaigns include grassroots strategies to expand its reach and depth.

The CIW chose tomatoes because they're Florida's largest crop, employing the most workers. Tomato picking is also the most difficult work. However, CIW's long-term plan is to expand to other crops, said Joe Parker, of the Student/Farmworker Alliance, a CIW partner agency.

Publix, Florida's largest supermarket chain, is a lynchpin for CIW, which is sponsoring a spring campaign that includes a two-week march from Ft. Myers to Publix's headquarters in Lakeland, Fla. "Everyone nationwide is waiting to see what Publix does," said Jordan Buckley of Interfaith Action of Southwest Florida, another CIW partner organization.

Perez said worker protections, such as



Student/Farmworker Alliance



the ability to redress grievances and report abuses “without fear of retaliation,” have “allowed farm workers to feel comfortable with filing complaints.” Many times, he said, problems can be resolved “in the fields.”

Abusive practices by crew leaders have declined, Perez said, and the time clock, punched by workers as soon as they arrive on the farm, replaced a system that allowed growers to bring workers to farms hours before they actually started work, time that was not compensated. The later starting times make it easier for families, who now can take care of their children before heading to work.

“We are starting to see a new day dawning in Florida agriculture,” Perez said.

UP THE EAST COAST in North Carolina, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee union (FLOC) is in the midst of a campaign to bring tobacco giant Reynolds American to the bargaining table to improve the plight of tobacco workers. In previous union campaigns in Ohio (tomatoes) and North Carolina (cucumbers), FLOC has used tactics such as boycotts and supply-line pressure to win victories. Winston-Salem, N.C.-based Reynolds, which registered nearly \$2 billion in profits last year, fought FLOC’s campaign

“We are starting to see a new day dawning in Florida agriculture.”

—farm worker Elbin Perez

Above, Farm Labor Organizing Committee members march in Toledo, Ohio, for immigration reform. At left, farm worker Elbin Perez fasting in front of Publix’s headquarters in Lakeland, Fla.



Empowering Women



Adama Diarra of Soro Yiriwaso, an Oikocredit partner in Mali

With the profit from her ventures, Adama can send her children to school and buy them proper clothing. She says the ability to save and borrow money has allowed her to reinvest in her own business and gain **financial independence**.

Oikocredit invests in women in 67 countries around the world.

Invest today and help Empower Women!

Minimum investment: \$250

Annual Interest: 2%

Learn more:

202.728.4143

usa@oikocredit.org

www.oikocreditusa.org/invest

Investments not available in
AL, AZ, AR, CO, GA, IN, NE, NH,
NJ, OK, PA, PR, TX, WA, WI

Reforms won by organizers include the use of time clocks, guaranteed minimum wage, and water and shade breaks.

for four years before agreeing last August to join a committee comprised of tobacco manufacturers, tobacco growers, and farm workers that will address issues such as freedom of association without fear of retaliation, wages, housing, forced labor, and supply chain inequities.

FLOC founder and president Baldemar Velasquez (see “On Earth as in Heaven,” page 29) has used an “engaging-the-supply-line” tactic to gain leverage against corporate giants such as Reynolds. Velasquez traveled to Europe to meet with Reynolds’ subsidiaries, where corporate officials were more sympathetic to the plight of U.S. farm workers. He initiated campaigns to pressure convenience store chains Wawa and Kangaroo Express, two of Reynolds’ biggest buyers, to intervene and ask Reynolds to enter into talks with FLOC.

“Anyone who’s involved in the production, distribution, and sales of a product is subject to being held accountable to anyone who is suffering, who’s being exploited, who’s being treated as less than a human being; so that’s fundamental,” Velasquez told *Sojourners*. “You’re talking about a very diversified agricultural system in which tobacco is one of the main crops, which maintains the economy of these small, individual-family farms. So we’re very calculated in terms of taking on the tobacco industry, holding them accountable.”

The cost of doing business in the production chain must also “be sustainable for the farmer and the workers that do the back-breaking, sweaty, hard work to produce the wealth for those tobacco companies,” Velasquez said.

IN 2012, LABOR union membership fell from 11.8 to 11.3 percent of workers nationally, yet FLOC and the United Farm Worker (UFW) unions have seen growth. Even in North Carolina, where just 2.9 percent of the state’s work force is unionized—the lowest in the nation—FLOC has made headway. FLOC won a contract with the Mt. Olive Pickle Company in 2004, with backing from the state growers’ association.

“Strangely enough FLOC has flourished at the times when unions have had it the worst,” Velasquez said, noting that the union’s collective-bargaining agreement with Campbell’s Soup came in the 1980s, the period when Ronald Reagan’s anti-union initiatives broke

up the air traffic controllers’ union.

UFW vice president Giev Kashkooli said the California-based UFW has been growing the last couple of years in terms of membership, collective bargaining agreements, and contracts, “and we’re hopeful for an even bigger year this year.” California employs half of the nation’s agricultural workforce.

NATIONALLY, FLOC AND UFW have shifted priorities to include immigration reform initiatives. “The one big thing that we do nationally in a very coordinated way is our work on trying to win a new immigration process,” Kashkooli told *Sojourners*. “It’s totally integrated into what we do.

“If the question is asked among our members, ‘Who knows someone that’s been deported?’ everyone will raise their hand.”

FLOC director of programs Justin Flores, who works out of Dudley, N.C., said FLOC’s labor organizing and immigration reform efforts are one and the same. “They’re almost inseparable because there are almost no U.S. citizen or permanent-resident farm workers in this state.”

With no blueprint established for immigration reform, Roberta Perry of the National Farm Worker Ministry, a 93-year-old faith-based organization headquartered in St. Louis, worries that farm workers may be required to provide documentation to prove their work histories in the U.S., a requirement that will be near-impossible to meet. Pay stubs, rent receipts, tax records, and other proof, Perry said, may be required in order for farm workers to be considered for residency, records that for many may not exist.

Catherine Tactaquin, executive director of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, said she had little hope President Obama would be able to accomplish immigration reform in his first term. Tactaquin, 61, the daughter of an immigrant farm worker father from the Philippines, said, “The politics of the Right have dominated immigration policy for more than two decades. We never believed immigration reform would move during the last four years; it was more likely that that door would open in this term, which is what has happened.” ■

Patrick O’Neill is a freelance writer living in Raleigh, N.C.

ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN

Farm labor organizer Baldemar Velasquez on making it real in the here and now.

A RECENT ONLINE profile referred to farm worker labor union leader Baldemar Velasquez as both “militant” and “genius.” It’s hard to argue with either of those designations for the 66-year-old founder of the dynamic Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC). The Toledo, Ohio-based union has used a David-vs.-Goliath style to bring corporate giants to the collective bargaining table, thereby improving the living and working conditions of perhaps the least powerful worker group in the nation.

Velasquez, an ordained evangelical Christian who received a MacArthur Fellowship in 1989, simply sees FLOC’s work as God’s work, and his opponents might consider

following the wisdom of the Pharisee Gamaliel, who said of the apostles, “I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone ... You might even be found opposing God!”

Velasquez, who founded FLOC in 1967, has yet to lose a battle. A 1967 strike Velasquez led against Ohio tomato growers resulted in two dozen growers signing union contracts. A national FLOC boycott of Campbell’s Soup in the 1980s resulted in a three-way collective bargaining agreement that raised wages and improved working conditions for tomato workers. A six-year campaign in North Carolina resulted in another three-way deal between FLOC, cucumber growers, and the Mt. Olive Pickle Company. Today, FLOC is going after another giant, Reynolds American, the second-largest U.S. producer of tobacco products.

While perseverance and cunning strategies are FLOC’s organizing hallmarks, Velasquez also brings his deep faith to FLOC’s campaigns. He insists on loving his enemy, and on his followers doing the same.

“Everything that we do, everything that we say, and everything that we work around is based on loving your neighbor as yourself—including the grower, including the manufacturer, including the company,” Velasquez told *Sojourners*. “And you learn to hate the sin and love the sinner.

“We can have righteous anger about bad things, but don’t let your righteous anger get carried away with making wrong decisions. You’ve got to love those people, and because you love them you want to tell them they’re making a mistake because the decision that they’re making is hurting other people and they’re going to be held accountable



“Everything that we do is based on loving your neighbor as yourself.”

—Baldemar Velasquez, above

before the Lord in the end.

“For sure, we’re all going to face that day, and we’re going to go before the Lord, who will say: ‘What did you do when you were down there?’ You’re going to be held accountable. I want to be able to say what I did, and I want to have the Lord say to me, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”

“FAITH IS absolutely necessary” in FLOC’s struggles for justice, Velasquez said. “If you didn’t have faith—the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things

not seen—you wouldn’t have any comprehension of God’s kingdom, which is righteousness, peace, and joy. And understand that you can’t have joy unless you have peace, and you can’t have peace unless there are those who stand up for righteousness; not self-righteousness, but the righteousness of the Lord. And the Lord wants to see us all living in some kind of harmony, reconciled with one another.”

Coming to “know the Lord,” Velasquez said, “turned my thinking upside down.” The son of migrant farm worker parents, Velasquez toiled in the fields into his 20s as a means to pay off his college loans. “Before I knew the Lord, it was about getting even. I [was] tired of all the abuses my family went through and the cheating and the stealing of our wages and the verbal mistreatment of my mom and my dad and my siblings and so on. I just got fed up with it, and I didn’t want to put up with it anymore.

“Reconciliation is a very tough thing, because you have to put the truth on the table and reconcile the oppressor with the oppressed—the people who are on the bottom,” Velasquez continued. “When I began to understand that, I began to know the difference between getting even and true reconciliation.”

In FLOC’s current fight with Reynolds, Velasquez says victory is already assured. “It’s not a question of optimism,” he said. “I know that, as a Christian, victory is already won in the heavens; all we need is for those of us who are on the earth, us pilgrims, to walk it out on this earth. We need to make real on this earth what is already real in heaven.”

—Patrick O’Neill



BREAKING THE IMPASSE

**It's time to reframe the church's conversation around
same-sex relationships.**

THE CHURCH IS locked in a polarized debate around same-sex relationships that is creating painful divisions, subverting the church's missional intent, and damaging the credibility of its witness. We've all heard the sound-bite arguments. For some, condoning or blessing same-sex relationships betrays the clear teaching of the Bible, and represents a capitulation to the self-gratifying, permissive sexual ethic of a secularized culture. For others, affirming same-sex relationships flows from the command to love our neighbor, embodies the love of Jesus, and honors the spiritual integrity and experience of gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.



To find a new way forward, we must engage the deep truths of God's Word and listen intently to the witness of gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.

The way the debate presently is framed makes productive dialogue difficult. People talk past one another. Biblical texts collide with the testimony of human experience. The stakes of the debate become elevated from a difference around ethical discernment to the preservation of the gospel's integrity—for both sides. Lines get drawn in the ecclesiastical sand. Some decide that to be “pure” they must separate themselves spiritually from others and break the fellowship of Christ's body. Then the debate devolves into public wrangling over judicial proceedings, constitutional interpretations, and property ownership. Meanwhile, the “nones,” those who are walking away from any active religious faith, find further confirmation for their growing estrangement.

Mirroring the dynamics of contemporary secular politics, the debate is driven by small but vocal minorities with uncompromising positions at one end or another of the spectrum. For the majority in the middle, who may be unclear about their own understandings, exploring their questions is made difficult because of the polarized toxicity of the debate. Further, those in positions of leadership in congregations or denominations come to regard the controversy over same-sex relationships as the “third rail” of church politics. They don't want to touch it. I know this because I've been there myself.

Thus, the controversy over same-sex relationships in the church seems like it's at a theological and political cul-de-sac. Within the present framework, finding a way forward without significant injury, damage, and division appears difficult if not nearly impossible. We need to push the “reset” button, and figure out how to reframe this debate.

WHEN CHRISTIANS CONFRONT difficult ethical issues, we bring to our discernment the tradition of what the church has said, our understanding of the Bible, and the testimony of our experience, all illumined by the Holy Spirit. Even when we are not consciously aware of these three dimensions, they each still play some part. The challenge is to keep them in balance, and in dialogue with each other. Problems come when we try to isolate just one of these as the only source of truth, and fail to recognize how they depend on one another. The church's debate over same-sex relationships

has often reflected the weaknesses of a one-dimensional approach to discerning truth.

We also can fail to recognize how our trust in the Spirit, working through tradition, the Bible, our intellect, and our own experience, continuously guides us into all truth, including the deepest truths within scripture itself (John 16:13). Especially from the Reformed tradition, we understand that this is an ongoing process, continually being enlivened by the Spirit's work as experience and scripture interact in the ongoing life of the Christian community.

Recently I listened to a sermon by Rev. Adam Hamilton, lead pastor at the Church of the Resurrection near Kansas City. With more than 16,000 members, this is the largest congregation of the United Methodist Church in the United States, and Hamilton is known for his evangelical convictions as well as the social outreach of this congregation. Rev. Hamilton was preaching a series titled “Wrestling with the Bible,” helping the congregation understand difficult or puzzling passages and get to the deeper truths of scripture.

In the sermon I heard, Rev. Hamilton dealt with scriptural passages dealing with the role of women, slavery, and homosexuality. I was particularly intrigued by what he said about slavery. The Bible contains no less than 326 references to slavery. All but two of them, Hamilton explained, either condone slavery or assume that it was a given part of the social structure. Yet today, no one needs to be convinced that slavery is utterly opposed to God's intention, and that opposition to slavery was and is a compelling biblical mandate.

But in the middle of the 19th century, Christians could argue that the tradition of the church, the clear witness of scripture, and even their human experience (if they were not slaves) all convinced them that slavery was ordained by God. Many made exactly those arguments from the pulpit. It took the persistent work of the Holy Spirit, and a deeper engagement with scripture that went beyond the assumed meaning of many texts, along with careful attentiveness to the human experience of those who suffered, to lead some Christians to courageously support the cause of abolition.

Of course many will argue that the issues of slavery and of same-sex relationships

should not be comparable. But the church's struggle with slavery does illustrate forcefully how assumed understandings of scripture, based on simple readings of the text, have been overturned through a deeper engagement with the truth of God's Word, enlivened by the witness of human experience.

Today, the church must find a new way forward from its present crippling and incriminating battle over same-sex relationships. Doing so will involve a fresh and sincere commitment by all to engage the deep truths of God's Word, and to listen intently to the witness of gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, all within the trusting fellowship of the church, where we expect the Spirit to lead us into the fullness of God's truth and life, all while keeping faithfully and fearlessly engaged in asking what the words of the Bible actually mean for their context and for ours.

James Brownson's new book, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* (see "A Deeper Engagement," this page), persuasively argues that such engagement opens a door, through rigorous biblical interpretation, that can welcome those in same-sex relationships into the full life, ministry, and witness of the church. We are simply asked to look honestly, prayerfully, and openly at how we understand the full meaning of the Bible as it applies to same-sex relationships. The church needs this book as we seek to reframe this debate.

The commitment to take the Bible with all the seriousness and fidelity that our faith requires may still leave some questions yet to be answered, and some honest differences still requiring further discernment. But we can know that such differences are ones that need not divide Christ's body, poison our life, and impair our mission. That is the first essential step if we truly believe that God's Spirit is leading us into all truth. ■

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, former general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, is vice-chair of Sojourners' board. This article and the adjacent sidebar are adapted with permission from the foreword to *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, by James V. Brownson (©2013, Wm. B. Eerdmans, all rights reserved).

A DEEPER ENGAGEMENT

***Bible, Gender, Sexuality* calls us to a more honest dialogue about scripture's meaning for us today.**

DR. JAMES BROWNSON'S book *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* calls us all into a deeper engagement with the Bible itself, exploring in the most thoughtful and thorough ways not just what it says but, more important, what these inspired words of revelation truly mean.

On the one hand, Brownson argues that many of those upholding a traditional Christian view of same-sex relationships have made unwarranted generalizations and interpretations of biblical texts that require far more careful and contextual scrutiny. On the other hand, those advocating a revised understanding often emphasize so strongly the contextual and historical limitations of various texts that biblical wisdom seems confined only to the broadest affirmations of love and justice.

For all, Brownson invites us into a far more authentic, creative, and probing encounter with the Bible as we consider the ethical questions and pastoral challenges presented by contemporary same-sex relationships in society and in our congregations. In so doing, Brownson does not begin by focusing on the oft-cited seven biblical passages seen as relating to homosexuality. Rather, he starts by examining the underlying biblical assumptions made by those holding to a traditional view, and dissecting the undergirding perspectives held by those advocating a revised view.

One of Brownson's central insights is that the traditional argument against same-sex relationships rests on an assumption of male and female "complementarity." But Brownson does not find convincing biblical support for such a complementarian view. Moving the dialogue to this level, in my view, will prove to be enormously helpful. Instead of being trapped in shallow debates over the meaning of a few isolated biblical passages, Brownson grounds his approach in foundational biblical understandings of gender and sexuality. He takes the Bible seriously, engaging it faithfully and deeply, and encourages the reader to do the same.

Personally, I find his biblical arguments persuasive. Other readers may not. But in the end, the goal of this book is not persuasion, but invitation—into a broader, deeper, and ultimately more honest dialogue. Perhaps most important, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* can play a critical role in doing what the remainder of its title proposes: reframing the church's debate on same-sex relationships. That's a new conversation that would benefit us all. —WGM

A RELENTLESS FAITH

Steven Kim won't let anything—not even imprisonment—stop him from his mission to care for the people of North Korea.

ON SEPT. 23, 2003, Steven Kim was arrested and later escorted into a detention center in northeastern China with bound hands and heavy chains on his feet. His crime? Helping undocumented migrants—North Korean refugees—in China.

After decades of famine, mismanagement of resources, and a severe state-controlled system, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea—more commonly known as North Korea—has evolved into one of the most secretive and isolated countries in the world. About 2 million people have died since the 1990s, and still the country cannot feed its

story firsthand at his house church, Kim was instantly drawn into the underground railroad of supporters of North Korean refugees.

AFTER SEVEN MONTHS at a detention center, Kim was sentenced to five years in prison, under Article 318 of the Chinese criminal code, for helping undocumented North Korean migrants and harboring them in his home.

“No one expected a long sentence for the first offense. That was the longest sentence ever given. I was so upset. I lost all my strength in my legs and almost collapsed in court. After two hours I recovered,” Kim told *Sojourners*, describing the moment in court when the sentence was issued by the Chinese judge. “I realized I'll be in prison for five years. I have to make another plan. I thought I was going home [to America] and it could be very easy. But God had a different plan.”

Eventually, a peace settled over Kim as he rode the train for 36 hours on a crude wooden bench, shackled with other prisoners, to a jail with 3,800 other felons in another city in northeastern China. “God's peace and thankfulness came upon me. The living God became the power for me to win over all the troubles I had experienced,” he said, with a half-crescent smile on his round, freckled face, revealing crooked teeth.

From nearly the start, Kim's stint in

“It wasn't easy to read the Bible. Prison prohibits religious acts.”

people without foreign aid. This shortage of food has driven thousands of North Koreans to migrate illegally to China by crossing the Tumen River in search of food and respite from the totalitarian regime.

Before his imprisonment, Kim—a Korean-American businessman from Long Island, N.Y.—lived in China and operated a furniture business. As a non-denominational Christian, Kim became a member of an unregistered house church in Shenzhen, which operated outside the Chinese government's control. After meeting Tae Nam, a North Korean man, and hearing his desperate

A guard keeps watch in a prison in Deyang, China.



China Foto Press





At a rally in New York City, Steven Kim holds a photo of himself used by activists who helped free him from a Chinese prison. Kim was incarcerated for four years for advocating on behalf of North Korean refugees incarcerated by the Chinese government.

jail had several unusual and timely interventions that profoundly marked him. He could barely lead a Bible study or recite a full hymn when he first entered prison. He started out with the self-sufficient air of a business administrator, but that all changed.

In the first week, a young North Korean prisoner handed him a Bible, instructing him to read it cover to cover. Kim recounts, "This boy said, 'If you want to go home, you

and study the Bible with at least two other inmates at each gathering. The North Koreans began to see Kim as a father figure, and they confided in him about their experiences before imprisonment.

A pair of young North Korean men was sentenced to 15 years in prison for stealing ginseng roots. Another person stole a motorcycle. One was imprisoned because he stole a mobile phone. "They were so desperate

Thousands of North Koreans migrate illegally to China by crossing the Tumen River in search of food and respite from the totalitarian regime.

must read the Bible 10 times." Kim managed to do that in the first year; he read the entire Bible for the first time in 19 days.

"It wasn't easy. Prison prohibits religious acts. We're not allowed to have a Bible. The leader of the room tried to stop me from reading the Bible. He tried to force me to close the book; he cursed and threatened me," Kim explained. "My other enemy was the wooden floor when I tried to read. I sat down all day and my ankle was swollen and in great pain."

Kim's wife began to send him money every month, allowing him to buy extra food, in addition to the prison meals, and mailed him several books. Kim read 50 books by the time he left prison, and he copied the Bible by hand several times.

Using his business skills as an efficient planner, Kim organized an underground church in the prison, meeting mostly in the toilet and shower areas to sing quietly

and no one helped them. They didn't know what to do and wanted to eat. Some crossed the [Tumen] river and asked the Chinese for help. The Chinese took advantage and hired them as slave labor," Kim explained. "They do not receive full wages. They wait and wait and, after they are not paid, they attack the boss. Their state of mind is desperation and the Chinese government tries to arrest and repatriate them back to North Korea." Refugees repatriated by the Chinese authorities are sent back to North Korea, into one of its many labor camps where reportedly at least 200,000 prisoners are doing time. Kim noted, "They do not want to be sent back, so they try to protect themselves and become violent."

As he cleaned the floors, took on the tasks that no other prisoner wanted to do, and offered his meals to others while fasting, Kim prayed others would see Christ in him. His acts of kindness opened up opportunities

for him to pray for others. "Later I found 100 North Korean prisoners. They looked for me and came to my group for help. Sometimes I gave them a Bible or books and food. My prayer team became evangelists," he said. However, the work was not without its challenges. "I was forced into isolation and [the guards] forbade me from mingling with North Koreans."

Carl Herzig, author of the biography *The Fearless Passage of Steven Kim*, said, "Steven's experiences and the descriptions of conditions and practices in Chinese prisons will shock people and open their eyes. The practice of scheduling executions in order to supply human organs to rich businessmen and government officials is such a barbaric practice. Most people have no idea this is going on and they, too, will feel compassion for the victims, as they will feel compassion for North Koreans—both those who have escaped to China and those who are still there."

AFTER FOUR YEARS, 600 pages of journal writing and memos, and reading the Bible from cover to cover more than a dozen times, Kim was released from prison at last. He reunited with his wife, two sons, and daughter and crisscrossed the United States giving talks about his experience imprisoned in China. He also shared his story with the media and testified before the U.S. government about the plight of North Korean refugees in China.

"Steven is so passionate to the point that he's risked a lot personally. He's been helping North Korean refugees out of great difficulty, at a personal cost. It's rare because a lot of South Koreans are not that keen on helping North Koreans and discriminate against them," said Armanda da Roza, the director of Feed the Hungry, an organization in Hong Kong that brings food aid to North Korea.

In May 2008, Kim started 318 Partners, a U.S.-based nonprofit humanitarian organization, to start a "Schindler's mission" to rescue trafficked North Korean women refugees in China. He named the organization 318 Partners for two reasons: He was arrested for helping North Korean refugees under Article 318 of the Chinese penal code and, in Genesis 14:14, Abraham sent 318 warriors to rescue Lot, his nephew.

Continued on Page 46

Second Line

Blindfolded and gagged, tossed in the back
of a car—it's how they gather up young men
and after tire irons and chains, leave some

lying in the road like dirt, rained on all night.
Some are bundled-up, tossed off a bridge
into the river whose muddy swirls warn:

kick, fight, breathe, twist your arms free.
Some do. They rise, spit out the rags
stuffed in their mouths, limp back to town,

and one begins to sing—slow at first—*Lord,
I want to be in that number ...* Another moans
a low muted tone where words won't go.

And there's a bridge from verse to verse,
where bodies rise out of thicket and ditch,
out of jail cell, ravine and watery grave,

where gone, invisible hands seem to lift
like drum sticks, and soul sax blood brass
begin to flow, a band improvising

resurrection, until the dead
take to the streets, a spirit insurrection,
dripping river muck and frayed rope—

with crow-pecked eyes, burnt flesh, charred bone,
they rise, every flown soul finding its way
back through troubled air to swell that song.

*Betsy Sholl, former poet laureate of Maine, lives in Portland. Her most recent poetry collection is **Rough Cradle** (Alice James Books). Photo by Derek Bridges*



The ruins of Notre Dame de l'Assomption, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, after the devastating earthquake in 2010. Below, an artist's rendering of the reconstructed cathedral.



By Edwidge Danticat

HOUSE OF PRAYER AND **DREAMS**

Haiti's once and future cathedral is a place of healing and memory.

WE WERE LOOKING at cathedrals while others were mourning and burying their dead.

It was the first day of the international design competition that would help choose a few architectural plans that might be used to rebuild Notre Dame de l'Assomption, Our Lady of the Assumption, Port-au-Prince's most famous cathedral. This cathedral was so central to the city that, before it was leveled in the Jan. 12, 2010, earthquake, its turrets could be seen from most places in Port-au-Prince, as well as from the sea, where mariners used a light on the cupola of the church's north tower to help bring their ships home.

During the 2010 earthquake, the Catholic archbishop of Port-au-Prince, Monsignor Joseph Serge Miot, was killed inside an administrative building adjoining the cathedral, along with priests and parishioners. It was the images of their



Inside CultureWatch

40 Guns, Culture, and Sanity

Danny Duncan Collum on rural culture and unacceptable risks

43 An Unhindered Hope

Mary Kate MacIsaac on *Making Friends Among the Taliban*

44 Converted, but Still Wrestling

Min-Ah Cho reviews *From Willow Creek to Sacred Heart*

mirrored faith, blind faith. We were looking at sketches and plans but had no idea who had designed them. Some of the entries contained written statements that were so moving in their optimism for Port-au-Prince and its 3 million inhabitants, their hopes for Haiti and her people, and their longing for the rebuilt cathedral to serve as a symbol of renewal that they nearly brought me to tears.

You see, I grew up in the shadow of that cathedral. I spent the first 12 years of my life in Bel Air, the poor but vibrant neighborhood that in part surrounds the cathedral. When

This cathedral was so central to the city that mariners used a light on the cupola of the church's north tower to help bring their ships home.

I started going to school, I would walk by it every day, along with another Catholic church that was also razed in the earthquake, Notre Dame du Perpétuel Secours, Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Together, the chimes of these churches' bells guided the routines of my day.

My entire primary school, which was nearby, was taken to Notre Dame de l'Assomption every Friday for weekly Mass, no matter what religion we individually practiced. And I was always pleasantly surprised that my uncle and guardian, a Protestant minister, never objected to my participation in this Mass. I became so intrigued by crosses, stained glass, and incense that, when I became older, whenever I traveled I always made a stop at a town's signature cathedral to see if it lived up to the signature one in Port-au-Prince.

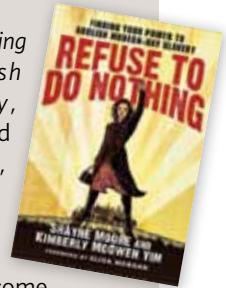
Yes, Notre Dame de Paris and Our Lady of Strasbourg are magnificent cathedrals, but they were not surrounded by bustling street markets; they did not function in the midst of such a busy atmosphere that the buzz of people's voices and cars honking were always part of the distant echoes of the Mass. These cathedrals might have been more pristine, but their saints probably didn't hear as many urgent prayers as those of Notre Dame de

Continued on Page 41

New & Noteworthy

NEW ABOLITIONISTS

Refuse to Do Nothing: Finding Your Power to Abolish Modern-Day Slavery, by Shayne Moore and Kimberly McOwen Yim, is a guide to how regular people, juggling the everyday demands of family and work, can become activists fighting human trafficking and slavery. IVP Books



LEADERS OF THE FAITH

Different writers pay tribute to the work and witness of Catholic sisters in *Thank You, Sisters: Stories of Women Religious and How They Enrich Our Lives*, edited by John Feister. These strong, faithful women are inspiring, no matter your tradition. Franciscan Media

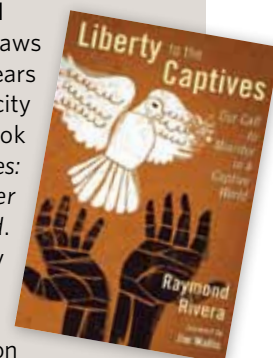


WE WILL SHINE

In photographs and brief essays, *Shadows then Light*, by Steve Pavey and Marco Saavedra, focuses on undocumented youth who engage in civil disobedience to protest detentions and deportations—and thus confront society with the deeper spiritual and ethical questions implicit in the immigration debate. shadowsthenlight.com

HOLY LIBERATION

Raymond Rivera draws on more than 45 years of pastoring inner-city churches in his book *Liberty to the Captives: Our Call to Minister in a Captive World*. This is a biblically rooted vision for social action and care and advocacy on behalf of our most vulnerable neighbors. Eerdmans



crushed bodies and their loved ones wailing around the perimeters of the cathedral's rubble that motivated me, a non-architect and non-Catholic—but a lover of cathedrals—to agree to join a development strategist, a preservationist architect, a structural engineer, a priest and liturgical consultant, the dean and associate dean of two architectural schools, and the editor of a magazine that discusses the dual issues of faith and architecture to help select three out of the 134 moving, elegant, and in some cases totally out-there designs that we had received from architects all over the world. Among the panelists, three of us were Haitian born, and many of the others had either worked in Haiti or in the Catholic Church for years.

The selection exercise itself was one that

Guns, Culture, and Sanity

I DON'T OWN any guns, and I've only fired them at inanimate objects, but I live in the country, so guns are a part of my life.

During deer season, the woods around our place sometimes sound like Baghdad circa 2006. We used to have a close neighbor who regularly fired a gun in his backyard, usually on Sunday afternoons—at what, we're not entirely sure. Our family has a three-legged dog that lost his right rear appendage to a gunshot wound. Our kids in Boy Scouts get gun safety training and rifle and shotgun shooting lessons in a program certified by the National Rifle Association.

So when the gun control debate heats up, as it has since the Sandy Hook School massacre, I come down with a serious case of mixed feelings. I think rural gun lovers are at least partly right when they say that urban gun control advocates look down on them as ignorant primitives. Many city people, and I'd dare say most urban liberals,



Creative Commons

Not everything that's fun is a constitutionally protected right.

don't understand the rural culture of hunting and shooting and can't be bothered to expend the moral energy that act of empathy would require. For me, that part of the gun control discussion pushes the same outrage buttons that go off when an economist says people in dying rural communities just need to move, or when someone else suggests eliminating all farm subsidies from the federal budget. Such comments betray the fact that the speakers neither know, nor care, about rural communities and rural culture.

On the other hand, fear of outsiders is also a part of rural culture. Groups like the NRA, and gun

manufacturers themselves, have done a pretty good job of exploiting that flaw, to the point that some of my neighbors are convinced that they need assault weapons to defend themselves against some vague, unnamable "them." And my experience of rural life, which has all been in the South, confirms that this can apply doubly or triply to "outsiders" with a different skin color.

Still, I'm also sure that some people around here own assault weapons simply because it's fun to shoot them at a target, or at some hapless animal. At a Boy Scout meeting last week, I heard a 14-year-old confess that he had been taken deer "hunting" using an assault rifle with a 30-round clip. For the record, the scoutmaster, himself an NRA member and avid hunter, condemned this practice as reckless and unsportsmanlike. But I imagine it is a thrill to let that kind of firepower rip. It's also a lot of fun to drive a car down the highway at 100 miles per hour. But not everything that's fun is a constitutionally protected right, and when gun lovers get all lofty and libertarian about their right to keep military weapons in their homes, they invite

the misunderstanding and contempt that comes their way.

Of course, the other subject that gets close to home when we talk about gun violence is violent video games. There's dueling research on that subject, but what I've seen of my children's peers, and of some game-addicted college students, leads me to side with the theory that violent games do promote real-world aggression. But it's also worth noting that the most recent adolescent mass murderer, 15-year-old Nehemiah Griego of New Mexico, accused of killing five family members, was a homeschooled evangelical Christian pastor's kid whose parents tried to tightly regulate his access to TV and video games. But they also kept an assault rifle in an unlocked closet, and now they and three of their children are dead.

There's no justification—constitutional, cultural, or otherwise—for forcing that level of risk onto our communities. It's just plain crazy. ■



Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel White Boy.

Continued from Page 39

l'Assomption, where worship began loudly outside, in the sun, at the foot of the cross, where novenas were shouted rather than whispered, and votive candles flickered wildly as hot paraffin dripped down the supplicants' arms.

While it is true that, in places like Haiti, many who have come to conquer and kill since the time of Christopher Columbus have carried a Bible and a cross and have used God's name to justify evil deeds, it is also true that many of us have found ways to make this conflicted legacy a part of our own.

"My childhood memories of the cathedral are quite joyful," recalls Haitian-American filmmaker Guetty Felin in *Broken Stones*, her 2012 documentary film about the cathedral and the people who have always found solace in its promise and now refuse to abandon its ruins. "Notre Dame was one of the only public buildings that I was not afraid of in these bittersweet years, sweet because we children were experts in creating places of refuge in our imaginations, even when the world around us seemed to be falling apart."

A CHURCH CAN be out of its place and time. It can be a museum or a mausoleum, or it can be an active, living, healing, gathering place, one of the design competition panelists said. Still, I couldn't stop thinking about the dead.

In addition to the 200,000 people who had died in the earthquake more than three years ago, I was also thinking about the 26—20 of them children—who had been killed in the massacre in Newtown, Conn., three days before we came together. Two of the children, children my oldest daughter's age, were being buried that same day. I also couldn't stop thinking about others who were dying and being mourned, even at that very moment, in Haiti and elsewhere, from hunger, from disease, from underreported wars, some without even the dignity of a simple burial, no national mourning, not even a piece of wood or a stone to mark their final resting place.

"We say nothing essential about the cathedral when we speak of its stones," Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote in *Flight to Arras* (1942). "We say nothing essential about Man when we seek to define him by the qualities of men."



A scene from the video game Saints Row.

TIME TO START TALKING

THE CEO OF one of the world's most popular video-game manufacturers recently denied any relationship between his products (some of which have their users re-enact mass slaughter) and real killing. The substance of such denial appeared to some to be no more complex than "because I said so, and some other people agree with me." Meanwhile, in the immediate aftermath of the Aurora movie theater shootings last year, Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein called for a summit of directors to discuss their imaginary guns. He later acknowledged that "I don't have the answers to these questions. ... They're so complicated; you need people with better facts and intelligence. In this situation I have to be a follower, not a leader." Refreshing humility from someone better known for bluster and self-assurance, now opening a door to a conversation on which lives may depend.

Film critics, too, have a responsibility to contribute to this conversation, so let me propose some ideas:

1. Portrayal and advocacy are not the same thing. The violence of *Reservoir Dogs* and *Looper* may be visceral, but it tells the truth about the suffering that guns and knives can inflict and may help people think twice about enacting real violence. The violence of *Home Alone* and *Transformers* may be cartoonish, but it lies to the audience and may fuel appetites for further destruction.

2. The shape of the narrative arc may be more influential than any particular acts of violence. Our culture seems to be addicted to the idea that order can

be brought out of chaos by ultimate force, that violence can literally "cleanse the world." This myth—this *religion*—shows up everywhere, not just in the movies. Indeed, it is a keystone of our politics. The best thing movies can do about it is to tell a different story.

3. Art is always political. Talking about gun control in the aftermath of a mass shooting is not politicizing a tragedy; attempting to silence those voices is.

4. Using cinematic guns almost always constitutes cheap drama. If we paid greater attention to the imagination (and to spiritual practices), we'd make better movies.

5. Guns may not actually be the problem. Research suggests that the factor that seems to have the closest implied causal relationship with increased gun homicide rates is not increased gun ownership, but rather social inequality and the lack of community bonds. The problem might therefore require a fusion of conservative and liberal solutions: Building up local communities and challenging economic inequality may have far greater impact on reducing gun violence than blaming Hollywood.

There is an overwhelming need for publicly compelling conversation about violence, guns, and the role of entertainment media. That conversation is often ill-informed. So if you have something good to say, please say it. ■

Gareth Higgins is a Sojourners contributing editor and executive director of the Wild Goose Festival. Originally from Northern Ireland, he lives in Asheville, North Carolina.

Looking at cathedral after potential cathedral, I thought of how many of us go in and out of worship places only at the beginning or at the end of our lives. Some of us never enter churches or other places of worship at all unless a tragedy has occurred and we are looking for comfort for ourselves and others. For so many of us, entering a church is a prelude to burying our dead.

A city, if it wishes it, deserves places with indestructible narratives, and churches contain within their walls plenty of stories of births and deaths, renewals and rebirths. A city, if it wishes it, deserves places of healing and memory, beacons and lighthouses, and churches are often called on to serve that purpose—indiscriminately, we hope, for both paupers and kings. A city, if it wishes it, deserves places where people can come out of the sun and wind and rain—believers and nonbelievers alike—and just sit down and cry. And churches can offer that too.

Notre Dame de l'Assomption was designed and built collaboratively by both Haitian and foreign architects and engineers, and it took 45 years until the cathedral was completed and formally consecrated in 1928. It took 35 seconds on Jan. 12, 2010, for it to be reduced to a pile of stones.

Finally, looking at the first-place design, a mix of the old cathedral and a futuristic new one, potentially seismic-resistant and green, a blend of the present, the future, and the past, I remembered a reading I had heard at one of the Masses I had attended as a child.

This is how my child's ear had heard this marvelous tale:

A prophet, Ezekiel, found himself in a valley filled with bones. Then a loud voice asked him from the heavens, "Ezekiel, can these bones live?"

The bones then rose out of the ground and came to life.

"Our nation is finished," the bone people said.

But the nation was not finished. The stones would speak. The bones would live. ■

Edwidge Danticat is an author living in Miami. Her next book of fiction, *Claire of the Sea Light*, will be published by Knopf in August 2013. You can see past and present photos of Notre Dame de l'Assomption and the winning design for the future cathedral at ndapap.org.

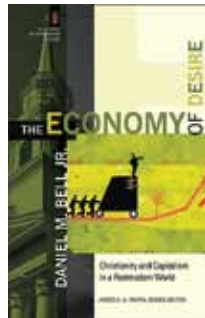
Reviewed by Andrew Wilkes

THE CHURCH'S ALTERNATIVE CURRENCY

The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World,
by Daniel M. Bell Jr. Baker Academic.

DANIEL BELL'S *The Economy of Desire* juxtaposes Christianity and capitalism, situating both in the context of postmodernity. The main argument of the book is that performing works of mercy—both corporal and spiritual—constitutes an alternative economy that can resist capitalism. Capitalism, in Bell's construal, is an economic system founded on voluntary contracts, private property, and an ideological regime where the rule of the market transcends the rule of law and disregards the reign of God in Christ.

The author draws on the work of philosophers Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze to set up a philosophical framework for talking about power and desire. His treatment of Foucaultian insights on the ubiquity of power is meant to decenter the state as the primary engine of social change. Deleuze's



society. The scope of the author's analysis is also impressive. Bell substantively engages the arguments of diverse figures from Adam Smith, Milton Friedman, and Friedrich von Hayek to Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther. Moreover, Bell's contention that proponents of capitalism effectively deny the possibility of social holiness is

worth the price of the book.

Throughout *The Economy of Desire*, the author foreshadows his final argument that the works of mercy—physical acts of kindness such as feeding the hungry, as well as spiritual works such as comforting the afflicted—represent an economy of grace and love that resists the transactional status quo of capitalism. Bell argues that the works of mercy, in an Augustinian sense, heal our capacity to love from the dis-

The works of mercy represent an economy of grace and love that resists the transactional status quo of capitalism.

work builds on Foucault's argument by conceptualizing people—and society at large—as flows of desire. Taken together, the claim is potentially but not necessarily democratic: Social structures organize desire in particular ways and are malleable due to the fact that power resides not only in the state or market but in the relational networks of everyday people. Under this account, for instance, the typical presidential election is not simply about securing votes, but about directing the aspirations and actions of the electorate toward a collective passion for growing the economy, expanding the middle class, and so on. Capitalism, for Bell, secures our loyalty because it shapes what we do as well as what we desire.

A few strengths of the book stand out. It contains a lucid discussion of the difference between commutative (fair contracts) and distributive (fair proportion of wealth, power, and other goods) justice within

tortions and disfigurements of capitalism. Moreover, this compendium of compassionate deeds, which are fully expounded in Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, highlight philanthropy's evasion of justice and envision a sanctification of the individual in ecclesial community that reorders our respective households within the global capitalist system. Fair enough.

The problem, however, is that Bell's account overestimates the extent to which ecclesial works of mercy alone can reorder our individual desires. To implement the alternate economy of desire highlighted in the text requires an active civil sector and a government that can serve as a countervailing force to the market, in addition to the sanctified work of families and faith communities.

Bell's argument could also be strengthened by integrating an account of race and class into its treatment of desire. How, for instance, do the racialized cultural

productions and consumer goods of capitalism shape our sense of who we are and who we could be? How do undocumented workers barraged by Fox News stereotypes and young black youth flooded with images of misogynist males in rap videos and so on heal desire? Incorporating these threads into the argumentative quilt of the book would heighten its persuasiveness.

I recommend *The Economy of Desire* to readers who are looking for an accessible and thoughtful treatment of the church's relationship to capitalism. Despite the insufficiency of Bell's constructive suggestions about the works of mercy, it is nevertheless a creative and robust proposal of a distinctly Christian vision of economics in the midst of the global capitalist economy. ■

Andrew Wilkes (@andrewjwilkes) is the faith and community relations associate for Habitat for Humanity-New York City and an affiliate minister at the Greater Allen AME Cathedral of New York.

Reviewed by Mary Kate MacIsaac

AN UNHINDERED HOPE

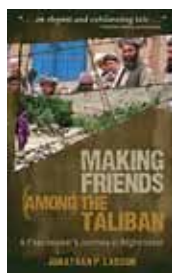
Making Friends Among the Taliban: A Peacemaker's Journey in Afghanistan, by Jonathan P. Larson. Herald Press.

IN EARLY AUGUST 2010, 10 aid workers were murdered, execution-style, in the province of Badakhshan, in northeastern Afghanistan. Among them were six Americans, two Afghans, a Briton, and a German, all part of a medical mission. It was the deadliest attack on aid workers the country had seen.

Dan Terry, 63, an American humanitarian who, with his family, had called Afghanistan home for more than 30 years, was among the dead.

What compels a person to risk his or her life in a foreign land so riddled with conflict? For Terry it was simple—he was called to a life of peacemaking and service.

A friend of Terry's since childhood, writer Jonathan Larson draws us into



Invest in what matters



Praxis Mutual Funds

Make a significant impact on the world when you integrate your faith and values with investments through Praxis Mutual Funds. It's one way we're doing better together. Learn more today!

Praxis Mutual Funds
(800) 9-PRAXIS
www.praxismutualfunds.com



You should consider the fund's investment objectives, risks and charges and expenses carefully before you invest. The fund's summary prospectus and prospectus contains this and other information. Call (800) 977-2947 or visit www.praxismutualfunds.com for a prospectus, which you should read carefully before you invest. Praxis Mutual Funds are advised by Everence Capital Management and distributed through FINRA member BHIL Distributors Inc.

The original social networking site.

1,400 mountain acres near Hendersonville, N.C.
A peaceful setting to rest and renew.
Transformation, within your reach.



KANUGA
www.kanuga.org

RETREATS • CONFERENCES • GUEST PERIODS • CAMPS • OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Terry's passionate character and the vision he shared with friends in Afghanistan: reconciliation and dialogue. "In the end, we're all knotted into the same carpet," Terry was fond of saying. From a swath of interviews with family, friends, and colleagues, both Western and Afghan, Larson has assembled "oral narratives," sharing with us the exhilarating life of a generous and gentle man, heroic but humble.

The best advice I received as a humanitarian aid worker in Afghanistan was from a leader cut from the same cloth as Terry: "Make no assumptions" and "listen first." We too often accept media caricatures of the other, labels that shut down discourse and clamp off possibility and hope. Challenging this, Terry insisted on the unwavering potential of each person he met. "Categorical 'enemies' have rescued me ... again and again," he once wrote to friends.

This approach, while considered naïve by some and cavalier by others, helped Terry form unlikely but effective partnerships,

Terry would work with individual Talibs who cared for the well-being of their communities.

such as with members of the Taliban, whose code had wrought so much suffering on the Afghan people. He would work with individual Talibs who cared for the well-being of their communities and wanted to help improve lives. In his dealings with Taliban administrators or village leaders, gunmen at checkpoints or subsistence farmers, Terry found the common ground, at times securing the release of hostages or bringing enemies together around a common cause. He believed there was no barricade that could not be crossed, no problem that could not be negotiated.

But not everyone appreciated this. Colleagues criticized him for his alliances with the Taliban, while his superiors grew frustrated by his lack of adherence to proper process and procedure. Here, Larson is nuanced in acknowledging the isolation, even brokenness, Terry felt as the organization he had worked with for years began to distance itself from his

unconventional practices. The creative ways of those rooted in prophetic values and driven by community needs have value, but systems that assure accountability and transparency to the donor and those we serve are also necessary. How to marry these without losing one or the other remains the challenge for many aid agencies, in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

In discussing Terry's community-led approach to development, Larson includes significant criticism of military strategies that focus on "winning hearts and minds," consequently blurring humanitarian aid with intelligence gathering. These often involve short-term, quick-fix projects with little, if any, community participation, which can encourage dependency while increasing the danger for actual aid workers.

Terry's approach to peacebuilding was at great odds with the "war on terror" that continues to be waged in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and most recently, northern Africa. In light of ongoing fighting and increasing drone warfare, can we ask ourselves and our leaders if we have done enough to seek a peaceful solution in Afghanistan? As international forces depart, have we engaged the context appropriately and encouraged a dialogue that seeks a shared understanding—some common ground, but also compromise—that could potentially save lives?

If Terry was still with us, he would have some suggestions. Thankfully, the stories that Larson has assembled provide guideposts from a man driven by an unhindered hope in our potential and nurtured by a stalwart faith in a God who loves.

Perhaps Terry's most powerful testimony, applicable to all people, at home and abroad, is captured in the carved words of an unpolished granite tombstone in a Kabul cemetery. It reads, "Above all, clothe yourselves in love." Dan Terry is buried here, but the impact of his life and the message he shared continues. ■

Mary Kate MacIsaac is a humanitarian communicator seeking solidarity for marginalized communities in places of conflict and disaster, including Afghanistan (where she worked for three years with an international aid organization), Iraq, Palestine, and Haiti.

Reviewed by Min-Ah Cho

CONVERTED, BUT STILL WRESTLING

From Willow Creek to Sacred Heart: Rekindling My Love for Catholicism, by Chris Haw. Ave Maria Press.



SOME BOOKS MAKE you want to sit down with the author on a sunny afternoon for a nice cup of tea. You would be excited to talk about how the book resonated with your own journey. For me, *From Willow Creek to Sacred Heart: Rekindling My Love for Catholicism*, by Chris Haw, is such a book.

Haw, a young, passionate, and deeply self-reflective theologian, shares his spiritual memoir. Part one recounts Haw's faith journey from a childhood as a lukewarm Catholic to teenage years at the evangelical megachurch Willow Creek, to college—including brief but powerful months in Belize, as well as days of protest against the Iraq war—and eventually to his present life in the apocalyptic landscape of Camden, N.J., where he returned to the Catholic Church.

Part two presents Haw's theological reflections on a variety of questions he has raised along his journey. He also focuses on common objections against the Catholic Church, such as the nature of the Mass as a sacrifice, the church's reliance on human tradition over the Bible, its hierarchical system, alleged ritualism, embellished architecture and ornaments, devastating scandals—including child molestation—and so on. Haw explores such challenging issues thoughtfully and courageously, while humbly accepting that he still struggles with them. Despite it all, Haw longs to see beauty and hope furthered through the Catholic Church.

I am a Catholic convert. I was raised in a Methodist family and trained in Protestant seminaries. By the time I decided to convert to Catholicism, I was starting my first year in the doctoral program of theological studies at Emory University. Feminist theology played a central role in both my theological education and spiritual formation, and it continues to today.

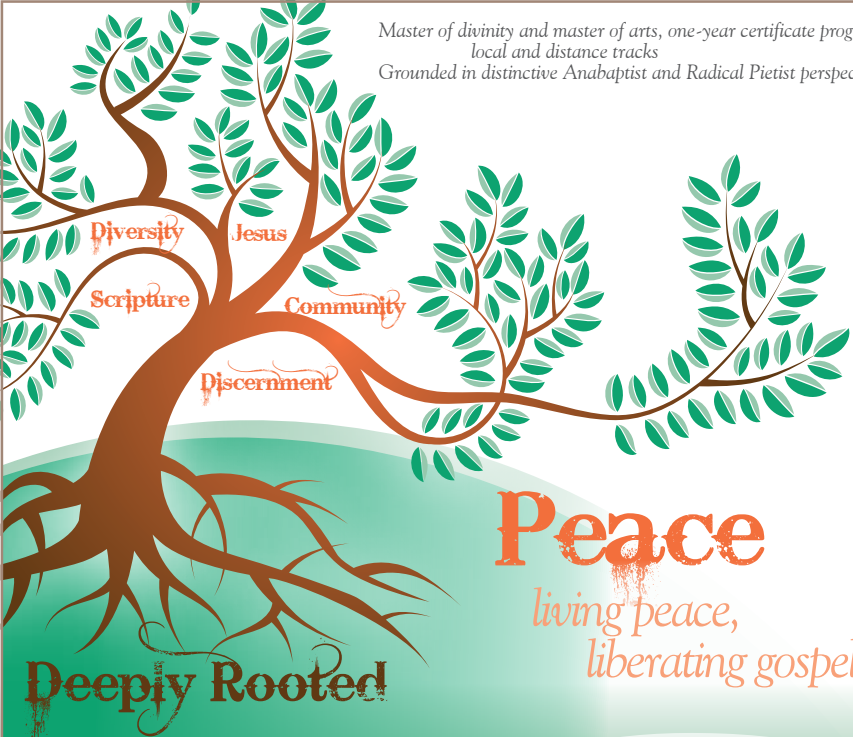
Shocked and confused by my decision, many of my colleagues asked, “Why do you want to submit yourself to an archaic, patriarchal, misogynistic institution that never fails to perpetuate scandals and controversies?” Although I fully understood my colleagues’ concerns, I saw in Catholicism, as Haw did, things that were too precious and too valuable to be ignored or abandoned. To name a few: the sacraments, which palpably en flesh our desire toward the divine; the mystical tradition, particularly of women mystics, which compellingly connects feminist theology to the voices of women in the past; and Catholic social teaching, which tirelessly strives to build a just and holy society. Those things continue to brilliantly shine out of the tainted, broken, and flawed human institution of the church.

Haw’s contemplation on his return journey to Catholicism rekindled my fondness for its beauty, but also reminded me of our responsibility—how intensely we Catholics need to work in order for the beautiful elements to remain alive, and how urgently, therefore, we ought to challenge the current state of the church hierarchy, which seems to have lost its capacity to engage intellectual conversation with critical voices within and outside of the church. As Haw explains, Catholics live in an age of irony because, as expressed by G.K. Chesterton, “There is no enduring way forward except with a sort of ‘fanatical pessimism and fanatical optimism’ combined.”

I was a bit surprised that Haw makes little or no mention of some of the burning issues that Catholics struggle with today, including the growing need for the ordination of women, the Vatican’s investigation and reprimand of U.S. nuns, its denouncement of some theologians’ books, and its stance on sexuality and same-sex marriage. Just as this book is “about the journey not the destination,” I trust that Haw’s theological reflection is an invitation, not a conclusion. I look forward to reading Haw’s next books and learning further from the contemplative action and active contemplation in his ongoing faith journey. ■

Min-Ah Cho is an assistant professor of theology at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minn.

Master of divinity and master of arts, one-year certificate program,
local and distance tracks
Grounded in distinctive Anabaptist and Radical Pietist perspectives



Peace
living peace,
liberating gospel



**Fall Application
Deadline: July 15, 2013**



Richmond, Indiana, 800-287-8822
www.bethanyseminary.edu/34sp

100 Years and Still Counting... *As We Enter Our Second Century*



Maryknoll Sisters
MAKING GOD'S LOVE VISIBLE

www.maryknollsisters.org/apr



Getty Images

ANSWER THE CALL

For more than 40 years, Sojourners has worked for the common good. We have followed the gospel call to justice, peace, racial reconciliation, and economic fairness and have built a growing community of people seeking to faithfully carry out God's kingdom among us.

Join the more than 2,000 people who've made their own commitment to the common good by supporting our ministries as members of **Sojourners' Sustainers Circle**. Through regular and automatic monthly giving—no matter how large or small—Sustainers members create a dedicated source of support that helps Sojourners empower God's people in a hurting world.

We invite you to become a part of the Sustainers Circle and help fuel Sojourners' public witness and online advocacy, as well as our magazine, websites, and preaching and teaching resources. With your help, Sojourners will continue to be a powerful witness articulating the biblical call to justice. Join us.

Visit **www.sojo.net/sustainer** or call Brandon at **1-800-745-4644** to set up your monthly gift today.

A Relentless Faith

Continued from Page 36

Kim, now 64, has helped rescue dozens of North Korean women, many of whom were sold as brides to poor and disabled Chinese farmers or to work for internet pornography websites targeted at men in South Korea. One woman he helped was sold six times. "One man bought her for 600 RMB (U.S. \$96) and slept with her for three or four months. Then he sold her to another man for a profit of 1,000 RMB (U.S. \$161)," Kim said, adding that she was sold again several months later. "She became a commodity," he said.

While 318 Partners will continue to support rescue work of trafficked women from North Korea, Kim is transitioning to a new ministry. He now focuses on providing shelter and daily food to North Korean orphans. Kim says that this mission opportunity is something that God has led him to do.

"Some of these orphans under 10 years old have no strength to cross the [Tumen] river. One boy said he was 13 years old, but looked 6 or 7 years old. He had so many scars on his head. The North Korean guards hit them on the head. One boy was bleeding," described Kim. A large number of North Korean orphans forage in the streets of China's cities in search of food. Kim mobilizes support for these orphans inside North Korea through his speaking engagements at South Korean churches.

Kim's vision—to see a prosperous North Korea built on a strong church foundation—propels him. An advocate of reunification of North and South Korea, Kim is committed to dedicating the rest of his life to the holistic transformation of North Korea.

He says he knows of at least 37 churches inside the regime, though some estimates indicate there are thousands of underground churches in North Korea.

"Churches are small, with at least four or five people. They have their own worship. We want them to have a job. The North Korean government is no longer giving food rations. They have to support themselves," said Kim. "We try to help them to live in their society as Christians."

Despite all that he's witnessed and endured, Kim remains optimistic about his mission and faith. "The church is not a building, but the people in the body of Christ. We have to build the body of Christ in North Korea," Kim declares. "We can't wait." ■

Sylvia Yu (@Light1Candle) is a TV journalist, author, and philanthropy adviser based in Hong Kong.

At the River We Stand

FROM THE RIVER to the rope. From the creek to the cross. From the dove and a “voice from above” to death by state execution and profound silence.

This is Lent. This is the Jesus Road, the Christian way. O Lord, how can we follow you?

Lent is time of remembering ourselves. In the ancient church, those preparing for baptism were publicly challenged: Do you renounce your bondage to Master Satan? Do you reject the slave-mind and all its glamour and subtle temptations? Will you allow Christ to buy your freedom?

The catechumen turned to face the east and the dawn, answering: “I give myself up to thee, O Christ, to be ruled by thy precepts.”

It is Lent. We go down to the river to pray. We step into the waters of repentance. We surface as a new creature in Christ. From that moment onward, we imprint on Jesus. This is our survival strategy as newborn disciples. We follow him, like ducklings behind their mother.

After his baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus is driven straight out—into the unloved places, into the



Mary Freeman (asplendidadventure.blogspot.com)

honey and oil as a salve for the sores on the soles of the lost. We carry bitter tears to the house of the one who is weeping. We listen—even when all we hear is silence. And follow him.

“This, then, is our desert,” writes Thomas Merton, “to live facing despair, but not to consent. To trample it down under hope in the Cross.”

To trace Jesus through Empire means following the track of a cross dragged through the dust, the ashes. Baptism means we are imprinted on Christ. We go where he leads. This is the Christian way.

During Lent we bury all our alleluias. Then turn our face to the east, to the dawn, and wait.

As the old slave song says, there are “Bright angels on the water, hovering by the light; poor sinner stands in the darkness, and cannot

see the light.” We wait.

In “East Coker” T.S. Eliot writes, “I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you / Which shall be the darkness of God.” Be still and wait.

In our utter lostness, overwhelmed by desert dispossession and displacement, some scavenger bird appears at our side—a hunk of bread in its beak, a scrap of our soul in its talons.

From weakened darkness at the edge of the world, a rose ripple comes across the sky. Out of chiaroscuro, the blue hour. A low bass note starts up, a deep tremor.

Something heavy in the earth is shifting. Somewhere, a stone is being rolled away. ■

Rose Marie Berger, author of *Who Killed Donte Manning?* (available at store.sojo.net), is a Catholic peace activist and a Sojourners associate editor.



Baptism means we are imprinted on Christ.

wilderness. There he is pricked by demons to toughen him up. He is being prepared. He must look into his own despair. Satan is the supreme surgeon for separating us from our hope.

This too is Lent. Staring into the face of our existential desperation. We also are being prepared, forced to release our grip on hope. All the life-scenes are smoky grey, splayed across canvas from an uncertain light source. How can we stand? We just do. We follow Jesus. Even if we do it with a thousand-yard stare.

We reach into our fast-ravaged gut and find bread to share. We mix

Fifty Days of Grace

HOW SHALL WE engage with scripture through all 50 days of Easter? There are clues in the haunting story of Jesus' appearance beside the sea of Tiberius. After Easter Day many of us are ready to let things quickly revert to normal. It is, strangely, both reassuring and uncomfortable to hear that those disciples, whose business had been fishing, wanted to get back to their boats so promptly after the horrors and wonders they had witnessed in Jerusalem. Jesus is waiting for them by the shore with breakfast already cooking. All is ready, yet he wants them to bring some of what they haul up in their nets, so he can include samples of their own catch in the menu. And what a catch it was!

Easter is our time to experience the grace that is always ahead of our game and is underway for us before we are ready. Yet grace does not exclude what we bring to the table. Grace expects and includes the work of our hands, the weavings of our imaginations, and the gifts of our unique experiences. In one sense, Eastertide is more truly a season of

repentance than is Lent. One thing we might need to repent of is our passivity—those times when we expect God to hand us on a plate the meaning we are hungry for. We need to bring our own bits to the cooking fire if we are to really eat with Jesus. It is part of the mix of grace that we must participate, not just receive.



*Martin L. Smith, an Episcopal priest, is an author, preacher, and retreat leader. His newest book is *Go in Peace: The Art of Hearing Confessions*, with Julia Gatta.*

[APRIL 7]

Trust But Verify

Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

THOMAS IS A radical. Do we keep on repeating the “doubting Thomas” cliché to blur the clarity of the challenge he puts to us? Thomas is adamant that, unless it can be verified that the uncanny apparition his colleagues claim to have experienced is *in actuality* a visitation from the Messiah who was tortured and butchered to death, then they might have been victims of a collective

of the wounded and broken. Old distinctions, once so clear, that marked who God was and where God was to be found now melt away as the implications of the resurrection unfold. By directly worshipping God-in-Christ, Thomas the radical is the first to witness to the staggering transformation: “My Lord and my God!” His daring outburst of praise fearlessly transgresses the rules of monotheism.

The writer of John's gospel concludes with a direct appeal to the faith of those hearing

this resurrection story. They have not seen with their own eyes, but they have “seen” the astonishing revelation of God. This God is found among the sufferers, rather than the powers that be; among the victims, not those with the battalions. They have found life by entrusting themselves to the living risen One.

The dramatic salutation that opens Revelation extols the radical reversal at the heart of the resurrection gospel. It is the One

who was pierced, who gave his blood as the victim of naked power, who now is not only alive, but wields the power of suffering love that makes him more powerful than all the kings of the earth put together. The seven churches of Asia, fallible and vulnerable though they seem, are visible manifestations of God's new realm, and a new priestly community of service.

[APRIL 14]

My Enemy, Myself

Acts 9:1-20; Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

HOW MANY PEOPLE really recognize Paul's claim that the series of appearances of the risen Christ culminated in his own experience on the Damascus road? Paul is stricken with a vision of light. Is he being caught up mystically into the heavens, making contact somehow with a resplendent hero among the heavenly host? “Who are you, Lord?” he pleads. It *seems* like a vision of heaven. But a voice answers in a way that brings Paul—and us—back down to earth with a bump. And down to the dirty business of conflict and oppression.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” Jesus is not a celestial being accessible only to the devout through rapture. Jesus is the suffering Lord, who is totally identified with those who have entrusted themselves to him. Those same ones who are now being beaten and jailed by the appointed guardians of order. This Messiah is intimately present and disconcertingly active in the children, women, and men who are intimidated and hurt for their blasphemous talk of a crucified Messiah. This selfsame Messiah is bearing their suffering and holding them up in courage. Paul is not experiencing Jesus for the first time on the Damascus road. He has already been coming up against Jesus time and again in the very persons of those whom he had a mandate to harass and bully. They are members of his Body! The risen Jesus suffers in and with the nonviolent, who endure violence to redeem it through suffering love. Paul is about to join them. He will learn of the Lord's message to Ananias: “I myself will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

The resurrection changes everything.

hallucination. Did they just *think* they saw the wounds?

In this week's Easter story, Jesus appears again. Thomas is given the verification he insisted on. Believing, he recognizes that the resurrection changes everything. God is now understood to be a suffering God, one who participates in the agony of a broken world. Worship is now due to a God who, far from being remote in an unseen world above, is in the here and now, on the side

[APRIL 21]

End of the World as We Know It?

Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

HAVE YOU EVER wanted to fling the TV remote down in disgust when your casual channel surfing brings up some grotesque program that lumps the book of Revelation with the quatrains of Nostradamus, smearing it as an occult work of prediction that, with the right key, will unlock the secrets of the end time? Where can we begin to clear the ground for this scripture to speak to us? On its own terms, Revelation is a poetic, subversive doxology born out of the faith of vulnerable and persecuted communities.

Somehow we will need to restore people's appreciation of the subversive power of poetry. Only poetry can convey the revolutionary paradoxes of Revelation. The prose of technocrats and literalists doesn't work. In today's readings we find paradox galore. A heavenly host in splendor? None other than the ordinary men and women from the battered little churches of Asia whose sufferings are in fact the great ordeal of the Messiah. Glorious robes of light? Their dazzling whiteness comes from blood, their suffering as witnesses to the crucified Messiah. Is there a leader, a promised great Shepherd from God? Actually, the only shepherd is one of the sheep, the Lamb who is one of us and acts as the bellwether ram to take us through the experience of being opposed and resisted in our witness to his path of nonviolent transformation through love.

[APRIL 28]

Fantasies or Visions?

Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES give us two visionary experiences. Peter recounts the waking dream, which he had in Joppa, of "something like a large sheet" (Acts 10:11) loaded with animals, clean and unclean, being lowered down from heaven. The visions of John, the exiled seer, culminate in

a grand finale as the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, prepared as a bride for her bridegroom.

Visions are different than fantasies. Fantasies are projections conjured up from our psyches and seldom kindle any real change in our consciousness. The psyche is intrinsically conservative. Authentic visions are an irruption of newness that circumvents our inner censors through the potency of symbol. We experience them as visitations, strenuous graces that briskly

Only poetry can convey the revolutionary paradoxes of Revelation.

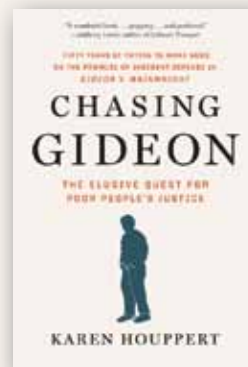
tear down the static stage scenery we have mistaken for reality, in order to reveal a vista of possibility and creativity.

Peter is shocked to discover that heaven already includes the full range of humanity, symbolized by the mixed bag of animals. The life obedient to heavenly reality is a life that practices non-discrimination, eager welcome, joy in diversity, and humility in equality. God demolishes the distinctions between clean and unclean. We see heaven as the place where our old games of pure vs. profane have been abolished.

John has a vision of God's new environment as a mobile city—one always on the move from heaven. Throughout scripture there has been a tension between the traditions of nomadic faith—resilient, mobile, flexible, simple—and traditions of city religion—rich in worship, complex in culture, fraught with inventiveness. Both have their limitations. Nomadism can be exclusive and city culture can become static and obsessed with permanence. In Revelation, the gifts of both traditions merge in a complex symbol of God's desire for a new environment in which we will experience divine companionship in our midst. A city that travels, always coming down from heaven, the source of all newness and hope. ■

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

"Chasing Gideon is a wonderful book, its human stories gripping, its insight into how our law is made profound."
—Anthony Lewis, author of *Gideon's Trumpet*



"A must-read for anyone who cares about justice." —Virginia Sloan, executive director, The Constitution Project

"Makes the case that defending *Gideon* is essential and a true test of our nation's commitment to liberty and justice for all."
—Anthony D. Romero, executive director, American Civil Liberties Union



THE NEW PRESS
Publishing in the Public Interest
www.thenewpress.com

Bucket List 2013

- ☐ skydive
- ☐ finish business plan
- ☐ take sailing lessons
- ☐ act in a play
- ☐ attend Summer Institute at CTU!

Deepen your knowledge and sharpen your skills while studying with CTU's renowned faculty. Summer courses are designed to fit busy schedules and varying interests. Spend part of your summer at CTU!

ctu.edu/summer-institute



Catholic
Theological
Union

The Real Reason Americans Love Guns

THE DAY BEFORE President Obama's second inauguration (campaign code name: "Neener, neener, neener!"), Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell sent an email to constituents with a message somewhat lacking in a spirit of new beginnings: "The gun-grabbers in the Senate are about to launch an all-out assault on the Second Amendment. They're coming for your guns."

This is disturbing. I don't have any guns, but I'm looking for places to hide them. And without guns, how will I protect my family from the coming assault? Can I hold off federal agents by flinging small appliances at them? *Those* I've got. In fact, I just got a new hand mixer. It's black and sleek, like the helicopters that will soon be circling over our homes. (Helicopter tip: Make sure the rotor blades have completely stopped before licking off the icing.)

Under Obama's new proposals, I'll probably have to register my appliances, or at least submit



What I would ask Mr. "LaPierre" [giggle]—while keeping both hands out where he could see them—is this: How do you stop a good guy with a gun who's having a bad day? Or what if he's really depressed or angry at his boss for not allowing him to wear camouflage clothing to staff meetings?

Granted, the Supreme Court, in its finite wisdom, ruled we have a right to have firearms to defend ourselves. But as it turns out, what we're defending ourselves against is—in the order of statistical probability—ourselves, our family members, and coworkers wearing camouflage clothing at staff meetings.

LET'S BE HONEST, your average American has a gun for only one reason: He wants to be a cowboy. I understand this. I wanted to be a cowboy, too. When I was 9. Back then, the future loomed with untold dangers that only a cowboy with his beloved horse and trusty six-gun could manage. But nowadays, most of us don't have horses (they can be dangerous), so instead we want assault rifles with high-capacity magazines. (Poignant aside: I've always considered *Sojourners* to be a high-capacity magazine. Just sayin'.)

And in the NRA, these gun owners have found their ultimate enabler. A few minutes on its website is enough to make you want to go out and shoot something. And if you buy the right accessories from

the NRA's online catalog, there's no stopping you:

- With the **Steer Clear Vehicle Holster** mount you can keep your gun handy to quickly resolve intersection disputes that otherwise would require time-consuming cursing out car windows. The **Under the Desk Holster** version is equally effective in settling office squabbles, quickly.

- Start your kids out right with an NRA camo-colored **Marshmallow Shooter**. Later, you can move them up to an **NRA Air Soft Gun**, a precise replica of a .44 Magnum pistol that, if brandished for fun on, say, Capitol Hill, will elicit the legendary sense of humor for which Secret Service agents are known. They'll get a kick out of it.

- Not to mention the **Flashbang Women's Holster**, which attaches easily to the center of most bras, giving the wearer an intimidating bulge that says "don't mess with me ... because I have three breasts."

Oh there's much, *much* more, including an **NRA Camo Zippo Lighter** which can be used to set fire to the neighbor's Gandhi yard sign, which he bought as a poster from *Sojourners'* online store. (Buy in bulk, in case you need to keep replacing them.) ■

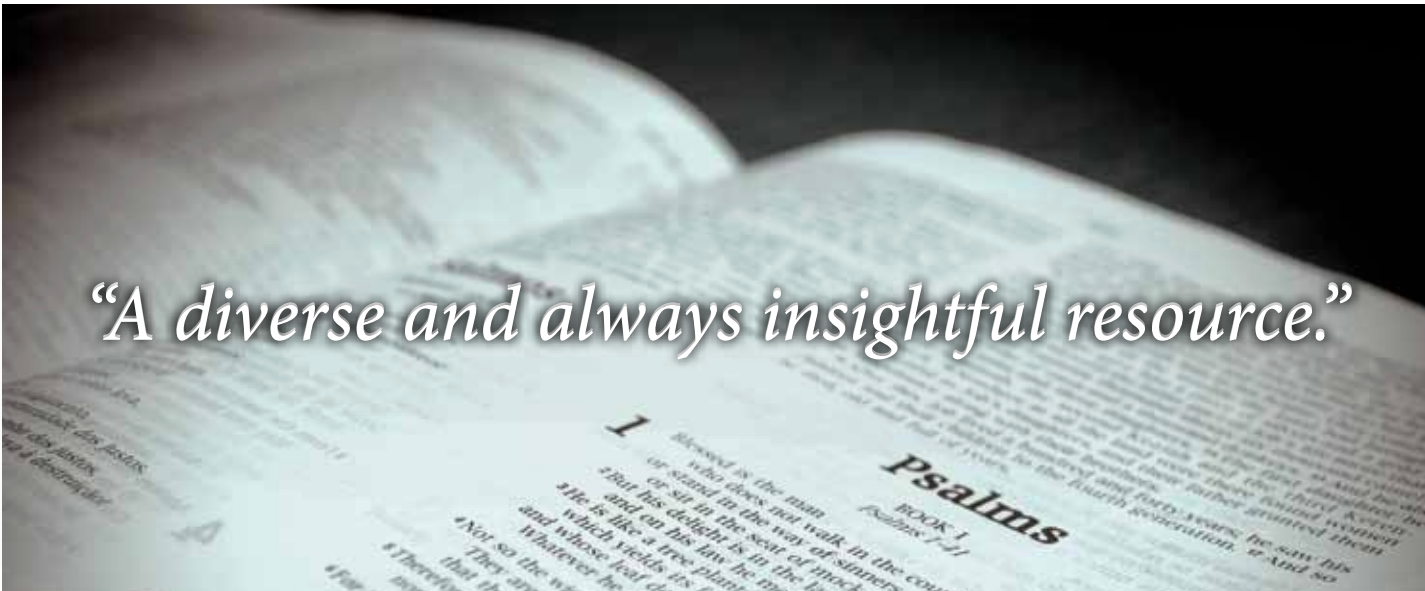
Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

I felt the same way. When I was 9.

to a background check before I buy another one. Although I've heard you can avoid that if you get them at private appliance shows.

This latest attention to gun control prompted National Rifle Association leader Wayne LaPierre to take the stage and, looking directly into the eyes of the American people, vehemently deny that he is French. Additionally, he helpfully pointed out that "the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun." Or was it the other way around? To be honest I'm not sure what he said, because I got distracted by the wild look in his eyes, and the bits of saliva that gather in the corners of his mouth whenever he talks about guns. This guy really likes guns.

Ken Davis



“A diverse and always insightful resource.”



“Preaching The Word offers diverse and always insightful approaches to our most sacred texts. I find this resource helpful in approaching the same subject matters from different points of view.”

Rev. David Pinkston, pastor and *Preaching the Word* subscriber
Pasadena Foursquare Church
Pasadena, CA

For nearly a decade, Preaching the Word has been one of Sojourners' most valued resources for Christian leaders. We have designed this amazing resource to help you prepare justice-focused sermons, contemplate reflections on the weekly scriptures, and access commentary not

found anywhere else. Preaching the Word is organized according to the Revised Common Lectionary, so preachers, worship leaders, and pastors, can easily find what they need to do their jobs. It's also perfect for Bible study groups!


Preaching *the* Word
Online Sermon Preparation and Scripture Reflections

 To learn more, please visit www.sojo.net/ptw

Preaching the Word is a subscription service offered by Sojourners. Sojourners' mission is to articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church and the world. All *Preaching the Word* proceeds go to help support our mission.

As we mark three years since a 7.0 magnitude earthquake devastated the nation of Haiti on January 12, 2010, United Methodists and friends everywhere are encouraged to continue their prayers for and solidarity with the Haitian people.

Please support UMCOR's ongoing work in Haiti, as well as those left vulnerable when disasters of this magnitude occur at a moment's notice.

Gifts to UMCOR undesignated, UMCOR Advance #999895, go to those who need relief the most.

www.UMCOR.org/sojo

